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THE DOMINION OF DREAMS

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THE DOMINION OF DREAMS

BY

FIONA MACLEOD

'L'homme a voulu rêver, le rêve gouvernera l'homme'

LE THÉÂTRE DE SÉRAPHIN

WESTMINSTER

ARCHIBALD CONSTABLE AND CO.

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. *For I have seen*
In lonely places, and in lonelier hours,
My vision of the rainbow-aureoled face
Of her whom men name Beauty: proud, austere:
Dim vision of the far immortal Face,
Divinely fugitive, that haunts the world,
And lifts man's spiral thought to lovelier dreams.

TO
EILIDH
THIS BOOK OF DREAMS
THAT ARE REALITIES

' Les choses de la terre n'existent que bien peu, et la vraie réalité n'est que dans les rêves.'

Les Paradis Artificiels.

*' The song is the bird's self : and the song and its inspiration are one.
. . . A bird flies past me, out of the west : I ask the fugitive, Is it with
my love as of yore ? I ask, in turn, the drifting cloud, the wind. . . .
You ask of me a song : of me, who am but the lyre. Ask it of Love, my
dear one : it is he who is the poet.'*

From the Magyar.

*' Who is it, therefore, that will speak of the visible such as it is ? He
who sees it.'*

PLOTÎNUS.

*' Le monde est grand : plus grand que le monde est le rêve :
Le ciel est vaste : plus vaste que le ciel est le désir.'*

A. LE BRAZ.

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*'I have seen all things pass and all men go
Under the shadow of the drifting leaf.'*
(The Hour of Beauty.)

*' . . . Only to gods in heaven
Comes no old age or death of anything ;
All else is turmoiled by our master Time.
The earth's strength fades and manhood's glory fades,
Faith dies, and unfaith blossoms like a flower.
And who shall find in the open streets of men,
Or secret places of his own heart's love,
One wind blow true for ever. . . . '*
SOPHOCLES : Œdipus at Colônus.

*'A dream about a shadow is man : yet when
some God-given splendour falls, a glory of light
comes over him, and his life is sweet.'*
PINDAR.

DALUA

I have heard you calling, Dalua,
Dalua !

I have heard you on the hill,
By the pool-side still,
Where the lapwings shrill
Dalua . . . Dalua . . . Dalua !

What is it you call, Dalua,
Dalua !
When the rains fall,
When the mists crawl,
And the curlews call
Dalua . . . Dalua . . . Dalua !

*I am the Fool, Dalua,
Dalua !
When men hear me, their eyes
Darken : the shadow in the skies
Droops : and the keening-woman cries
Dalua . . . Dalua . . . Dalua !*

ONE night when Dan Macara was going over the hillside of Ben Breacan, he saw a tall man playing the pipes, and before him a great flock of sheep.

It was a night of the falling mist that makes a thin soundless rain. But behind the blurr was a rainpool of light, a pool that oozed into a wan flood ; and so Macara knew that the moon was up,

* Dalua, one of the names of a mysterious being in the Celtic mythology, the Fairy Fool.

and was riding against the drift, and would pull the rain away from the hill.

Even in dull rain, with damp moss or soaking heather, sheep do not go silently. Macara wondered if they were all young rams, that there was not a crying *uan* or a bleating ewe to be heard. 'By the Black Stone of Iona,' he muttered, 'there is not even a broken *oisg* among them.'

True, there was a faint rising and falling *méh-ing* out on the upper darkness of the hillside; but that lamentable melancholy sound, like children crying in a forlorn place, was confused with the rustling of many leaves of ash and birch, with eddies of air through the heather and among the fronds of the bracken, and with the perplexed uncertain hum of trickling waters. No one utterance slid cleanly through the gloom, but only the voice of darkness as it speaks among the rainy hills.

As he stumbled along the path, stony and rain-gutted, but held together by the tough heather-fibres, he thought of the comfortable room he had left in the farmhouse of Padruic and Mary Macrae, where the shadows were as warm as the peat-flames, and the hot milk and whisky had been so comfortable too; and warm and comfortable both, the good friendly words of Padruic and Mary.

He wiped the rain from his wet lips, and smiled as he remembered Mary's words: 'You, now, so tall and big, an' not ill-looking at that, for a dark Macara . . . and yet with no woman to your side! . . . an' you with the thirty years on you! . . . for

DALUA

sure I would have shame in going through the Strath, with the girls knowing that!' But just then^o he heard the broken notes of the feadan, or 'chanter,' that came from the tall man playing the pipes, with the great flock of sheep before him. It was like the flight of pee-wits, all this way and that.

'What with the dark and the rain and the whisky and the good words of Mairi Bàn, my head's like a black bog,' he muttered; 'and the playing of that man there is like the way o' voices in the bog.'

Then he heard without the bog-cotton in his ears. The air came faint but clear. It angered him. It was like a mocking voice. Perhaps this was because it was like a mocking voice. Perhaps because it was the old pipe-song, 'Oighean bhoidheach, slan leibh!' 'Ye pretty maids, farewell!' 'Who will he be?' he wondered sullenly. 'If it's Peter Macandrew, Ardmore's shepherd, I'll play him a tune behind the wind that he won't like.'

Then the tall man suddenly changed his chanter-music, and the wet night was full of a wild, forlorn, beautiful air.

Dan Macara had never heard that playing before, and he did not like it. Once, when he was a child, he had heard his mother tell Iain Dall, a blind piper of the Catanach, to stop an air that he was playing, because it had sobs and tears in it. He moved swiftly now to overtake the man with the flock of sheep. His playing was like Iain Dall's. He wanted, too, to ask him who ~~he~~ was, and whose chanter?

magic he had, and where he was going (and the hill way at that!) with all those sheep.

But it took him a long time to get near. He ran at last, but he got no nearer. '*Gu ma h-olc dhut . . .* ill befall thee,' he cried angrily after a time; 'go your own way, and may the night swallow you and your flock.'

And with that, Dan Macara turned to follow the burnside-way again.

But once more the tall man with the flock of sheep changed the air that he was playing. Macara stopped and listened. It was sweet to hear. Was this a sudden magic that was played upon him? Had not the rain abruptly ceased, as a breath withdrawn? He stared confusedly: for sure, there was no rain, and moonlight lay upon the fern and upon a white birch that stood solitary in that white-green waste. The sprays of the birch were like a rain of pale shimmering gold. A bird slid along a topmost branch; blue, with breast like a white iris, and with wild-rose wings. Macara could see its eyes a-shine, two little starry flames. Song came from it, slow, broken, like water in a stony channel. With each note the years of Time ran laughing through ancient woods, and old age sighed across the world and sank into the earth, and the sea moaned with the burden of all moaning and all tears. The stars moved in a jocund measure; a player sat among them and played, the moon his footstool, and the sun a flaming gem above his brows. The song was Youth.

Dan Macara stood. Dreams and visions ran past him, laughing, with starry eyes.

He closed his own eyes, trembling. When he opened them he saw no bird. The grey blurr of the rain came through the darkness. The cold green smell of the bog-myrtle filled the night.

But he was close to the shepherd now. Where had he heard that air? It was one of those old fonnnsheen, for sure: yes, 'A Choillteach Ùrair,' 'The Green Woodland' . . . that was it. But he had never heard it played like that.

The man did not look round as Dan Macara drew near. The pipes were shadowy black, and had long black streamers from them. The man wore a Highland bonnet, with a black plume hanging from it.

The wet slurred moonshine came out as the rain ceased. Dan looked over the shoulder of the man at the long, straggling, crowd of sheep.

He saw then that they were only a flock of shadows.

They were of all shapes and sizes; and Macara knew, without knowing how he knew, that they were the shadows of all that the shepherd had found in his day's wandering—from the shadows of tall pines to the shadows of daisies, from the shadows of horned cattle to the shadows of fawns and field mice, from the shadow of a woman at a well to that of a wild rose trailing on the roadside, from the shadow of a dead man in a corrie, and of a boy playing on a reed with three holes, and the shadows of flying birds and drifting clouds, and the

slow formless shadows of stones, to (as he saw with a sudden terror) the shadow of Dan Macara himself, idly decked with feather-like bracken, where he had lost it an hour ago in the darkness, when he had first heard the far-off broken lilt of the pipes.

Filled with an anger that was greater than his terror, Dan Macara ran forward, and strove to grasp the man by the shoulder; but with a crash he came against a great slab of granite, with its lichened sides wet and slippery with the hill-mist. As he fell, he struck his head and screamed. Before silence and darkness closed in upon him like two waves, he heard Dalua's mocking laughter far up among the hills, and saw a great flock of curlews rise from where the shadows had been.

When he woke there was no more mist on the hill. The moonlight turned the raindrops on the bracken into infinite little wells of light.

All night he wandered, looking for the curlew that was his shadow.

Towards the edge of day he lay down. Sleep was on him, soft and quiet as the breast-feather of a mothering bird. His head was in a tuft of grass: above it a star trailed, a white flame—a silent solitude.

Dalua stood by him, brooding darkly. He was no shepherd now, but had trailing black hair like the thin shadows of branches at dusk, and wild eyes, obscure as the brown-black tarns in the heather.

He looked at the star, smiling darkly. Then it

moved against the dawn, and paled. It was no more. The man lay solitary.

It was the gloaming of the dawn. Many shadows stirred. Dalua lifted one. It was the shadow of a reed. He put it to his mouth and played upon it.

Above, in the greying waste, a bird wheeled this way and that. Then the curlew flew down, and stood quivering, with eyes wild as Dalua's. He looked at it, and played it into a shadow; and looked at the sleeping man, and played that shadow into his sleeping mind.

'There is your shadow for you,' he said, and touched Dan.

At that touch, Macara shivered all over. Then he woke with a laugh. He saw the dawn sliding along the tops of the pines on the east slope of Ben Breacan.

He rose. He threw his cromak away. Then he gave three wails of the wailing cry of the curlew, and wandered idly back by the way he had come.

It was years and years after that when I saw him.

'How did his madness come upon him?' I asked; for I recalled him strong and proud.

'The Dark Fool, the Amadan-Dhu, touched him. No one knows any more than that. But that is a true thing.'

He hated or feared nothing, save only shadows. These disquieted him, by the hearthside or upon the great lonely moors. He was quiet, and loved

running water and the hill-wind. But, at times, the wailing of curlews threw him into a frenzy.

I asked him once why he was so sad. 'I have heard,' he said . . . and then stared idly at me: adding suddenly, as though remembering words spoken by another:—'I have heard the three lamentable elder voices of the world: the cry of the curlew on the hill, the wail of wind, and the sighing of the wave.'

He was ever witless, and loved wandering among the hills. No child feared him. He had a lost love in his face. At night, under the stars, his eyes showed stars as in a pool, but with a light more tender.

BY THE YELLOW MOONROCK

I

WHEN the word went through Strathraonull that the wife of Donald Macalister of Dalibrog had given birth to a child, there was rejoicing. Dalibrog himself was not so well pleased, for he had hoped that Morag his wife would have borne him a son ; and as he was the most important man in the Strath, after the great Laird himself, he never doubted but that Morag would fulfil his trust in her. It was an ill thought, for him, that Seoras Macalister his brother ('an' him with such a starvin' big family behind him') should one day sit at Dalibrog, and care little whether or not the hill-rains were too heavy, whether some of the kye proved poor in milk, or if here or there a ewe or a lamb were lost. It was Seoras' way to care too little, or to say too little, about these things at the best of times ; but if he were once at Dalibrog, out of that wet poor farm of his up in the hills, he would be glad every day of the days, and when he died the place would be worth less by a long way than it was now.

If only the lands of Dalibrog did not lie under entail, he could keep Seoras out. However, though

Morag had failed this time, she would do better next. 'It comes o' marrying a Mackenzie,' he muttered to himself at times; 'I never knew one of the breed yet that wouldn't be after doing just the very thing you wouldn't expect, and just because o' that same expecting.'

So he made the best of it when he learned that his firstborn was a girl.

The Strath folk cared nothing about his hopes or disappointment. Their rejoicing was because there were to be festivities at Dalibrog House, and that every one from far and near was to be welcome. Donald Macalister had waited till he was forty before he married, and would not have changed his state then but that the fear of Seoras' big family was on him, for he loved Dalibrog better than kinship, or wife, or child.

The three great and as yet undivided and otherwise unfinished byres that had recently been added to the home farm—the model dairy it was already called, to the resentment of those whose dairies were painfully primitive—were to be filled with all who cared to come, and with meats and pastries and wine and beer and whisky enough to satisfy these, 'and as many more again.'

As the goings-on at Dalibrog fell on the popular day known throughout the Highlands as 'La Fheill Bride' (the Feast-day or Festival of St. Bride or Bridget), the stir was the greater. In every shepherd-shieling and hill-boothie to the glen-crofts and the big farmhouses, preparation of some kind was made.

Among the good news which went from mouth to mouth, perhaps not the least welcome was that which told the coming of Rory M'Alpine the piper.

Every one knew Rory, and he was as welcome at each fireside along the Strath as he was at any hearth throughout the West, from the Cowal to the Torridons. There was no better piper than he, and, what was more, there was no one who had so great a store of old tales and new gossip; and he had a bad reputation, too, not for dishonesty, but for morals, though little evil against others was laid to him. 'Let Rory beware o' the whisky, and let the girls beware o' Rory,' had become a saying; with the result that the girls of the glens were over-curious, and that there was ever whisky and to spare for Piper Rory M'Alpine.

For more than a year, however, he had not set foot in the Strath. 'Strathraonull may whistle,' he said, 'but the curlew's on the hill'—by which he meant that the Strath folk might look in vain for him or his pipes or tales.

For on the Hallowe'en of the preceding year Rory had been enthusiastic. That was all he would ever admit: 'I had a great enthusiasm on me.' There had been a big gathering at the manse of the Rev. Kenneth Maclellan to celebrate the marriage of his daughter Jessie to the son of Sir Hector MacInnes, a great laird, over away from Strathraonull. Rory had played with all his genius (the words are his); he had told old tales, and invented others old and new, and had spread gossip with a splendid im-

partiality; and, in a word, from noon till sundown had proved beyond all doubt that Rory M'Alpine was quite the most important person present, after the bridegroom, and a good deal more entertaining. As for the bride, she meant well, but if she had not had a mighty big tocher she would never have got young Ewan MacInnes; so they said.

By sundown on that memorable day, however, Rory had become so puffed up with his own elation and the sound of continual laughing praise, that he had drunk at least thrice the great quantity he was accustomed to allow as his 'measure.' He said afterwards that the misfortune of that night came about through the meanness of the Reverend Kenneth, who had given him some whisky that Black Donald himself would have found a murdering poison; 'for no gentleman,' he added, 'would get drunk all at once on good whisky,' forgetting, no doubt, that six hours' preliminary appreciation was a fair allowance. Whatever the reason was, he lost his good sense and good manners, and while the Reverend Kenneth was at prayer in the school-house (that had been got up as a ballroom for the wedding-party), Rory's pipes were heard coming near and nearer, jigging a blasphemous, merry dance; and then, while every one was trying to look solemn, the door swung open, and Rory himself strutted in, playing an old, wicked wedding-pibroch that was a shame there in that place given over to prayer and thanksgiving. Some smiled, some laughed, but most frowned or shook their heads with shocked

reproving glances. The minister was sore angry, and at last let go his pulpit voice and shouted to the piper to take himself off.

'An' for why that?' cried Rory, stopping to take breath, and cocking his head on one side, and winking hard this way and that, as though he were in a company of shepherds and drovers in a mountain-dew cabin.

'Because we are decent folk praising the Lord, an' we want none o' your rant, Rory M'Alpine!'

'Hoots, Mr. Maclellan, we're a' men an' women the night. It's no' every night that a quean is bedded wi' a——'

'That'll do, ye sumph,' shouted the minister angrily, 'an' get out o' this at once, for it's shameless drunk you are, you and your pipes too.'

But Rory only laughed at this. Then he threw back the pipes and tilted the chanter and let fly a long wailing screech; and in a minute or less the schoolhouse rang with the dancing, sweet, evil delight of 'The Hare amongst the Corn.' The tune was like a live thing, a leaping flame, and sprang this way and that, and laughed and screamed and jeered and mocked, and made men flush and stir, and the women grow white and nervous.

Suddenly two or three men, then half a dozen and more, put their arms round the waists of struggling, blushing girls; and a madness came upon every one there, and all kissed and hugged, and the younger ones swung to and fro in confused rough dance; while the minister, black in the face, thumped on.

the big Bible like Peter Mackechnie, the six-foot-four drummer down Fort William way, and Rory M'Alpine played an' played an' played till the veins stood out on his face, and his breath jerked like a jumping ewe at a gangway.

There is no saying what would have come of that tantarran (and evil enough came if all be true that's said, 'forbye the shame of it in that place an' at that hour an' before the Lord,' as Mr. Maclellan declared on the Sabbath that followed, when every one had bad headaches and stricken consciences) if Rory had not flung his pipes to the ground, and then danced on them with wild screeches and up-flung fists, and seized good Mistress Sarah, the minister's wife, and swung her this way and that in a touzled devil-may-care of a Highland reel, and had then kissed and hugged her with drunken amorous cries, and suddenly wept with loud hiccoughs and sobs, and then fallen like a wind-stricken scarecrow off its pole to lie in a shapeless, senseless heap at her feet.

Three elders and some young men carried Rory out, while Mr. Maclellan fanned his breathless, terrified wife with a hymn-book, and dried her scandalised tears with her new brown boa, and whispered blessed texts of Scripture and less holy words of marital exhortation.

The village-pond was not a score yards away, and they flung Rory into it, and John Macmillan the carpenter pitched the trampled broken pipes in after him; so that when, half sobered and panting for life, the piper struggled to his feet, and stood drenched

BY THE YELLOW MOONROCK

and forlorn—'with all the enthusiasm out o' me,' as he said afterwards—he appeared dripping and dishevelled with a shapeless mass over his head and shoulders, and two great prongs like horns sticking out: 'for all the world like an awfu' beast in the Apocalypse,' related, later, one of the elders to an understanding and sympathetic audience, who had their own associations with apocalyptic visions of the kind.

And out of all that came not only a cruel, heavy cold for Rory, and the shame of a preaching against him on the Sabbath, but the black looks of every lad and lass who had been led to sin because of his lawless bad music, and of every douce man and woman who wondered if the neighbours had seen anything forbye the common on 'that awfu' night.' He had no money, and his pipes were wrecked, and couldn't give out even the poor drone of a hymn, or a 'Praise ye the Lord'; and he had his cruel cold on him, with hunger and a starving thirst.

He had slept that night at the warm side of a hayrick, but it was drizzly and drear chill when he woke at the greying. He looked sullenly at his drenched clothes and the tattered remnant of his pipes, and held the broken chanter in his hand, while he muttered black curses on those who lead innocent men into evil ways, and on drink in general, and whisky in particular, and, above all, on 'that water o' mildew out of an old ancient ink-bottle,' which Mr. Maclellan had given him; and cursed the minister, and all the folk in Strathraonull, with the

coughing sickness to the cows and rot to the sheep, and a stake through the belly for that bitter misfit o' a man Macmillan who had ruined his pipes, and a black curse on the pipes themselves, and on the falling rain, and on the cold and hunger and bitter black thirst he had.

Then he sat down among the dry hay again, and tears ran down his face, because there was no pity in the world, and no God, and in his wet pockets never a pipeful of tobacco nor a match to light old cinders with for the whiff of a whiff.

He put his right hand to his breast to feel if his broken heart had still a beat to it, when his fingers touched something cold and hard. For a moment he dreamed God's mercy had left him a forgotten pipe, but the next he recognised a tin whistle he had bought three weeks before at a booth Glenshiel way, and had played on often since. He was in little mood for tin whistles or any other clamjaffry after what the pipes had led him to, but mechanically he began to blow a few dismal notes. Then an air came into the whistle and sang itself. It was like wild bees coming out of the heather, when the notes crept humming or singing or laughing out of the holes in the tin tube. Rory wondered what the air was. He played idly, and it came again. He knew it now; it was 'O'er the hills and far away.' While the drizzle soaked his stained rusty hair (red enough in the sunlight, or when he was talking and smiling before the peats, or playing reels 'in a barn to the flames of pine-torches), a shine came

into his blue eyes. He played the sweet dreamy air three times. Then, with a sigh, he played a song he loved, 'A' Chruinneag Ileach' (The Islay Maid), and put the tin flute on his knee when he had ended, and stared before him, with the wet in his blue eyes, while words of the song fell from his lips :—

'Och, och mar tha mi ! 's mi nam aonar

O sorrow upon me that I'm here so lonely,
With black Despair with my heart in his grip :
There's tears in my eyes for each drop from the skies,
And my love is gone from me like vows from the lip.'

Then he lifted the tin flute again, and played air upon air. And soon he forgot the heavy cold that was on him, and the chill and the empty belly and the bad thirst, and all the bitter evils of the world. He saw green glens waving in warm wind, and streams with fish splashing a whiteness over the running blue, and meadows filled with cattle gleaming white and red in the sunshine ; or long fields of green corn or yellow wheat, lifting lances of flame under flying banners of the shadows of white clouds ; or still lochs crimped with the little dancing feet o' moonshine ; or great lonely moors, with grey-brown ptarmigan fleeting from rock to rock, or a kestrel hawking like a drift of wind-blown rain, and nothing more to be seen or heard in all the waste but a woman with white shoulders and long, black hair sitting by a tarn and singing a wild forlorn song, evil-sweet ; or he saw quiet places, under the stars, and an unknown folk moving blithely to and fro, and

singing and laughing, all clad in green, like moonbeams in lily sheaths he thought. One of these delicate glad people came close to him, and played a little wild fantastic air, and Rory's tears fell because of his broken pipes, and because he could not capture the sighs and laughter of faëry, and he felt a sob in his heart when the slim green harper laughed, and he looked and could see nothing but a white foxglove in the moonshine, and heard nothing but a chime of little tinkling bells.

He came out of his dreams at that, and put a black curse on the slow-falling rain. Then, remembering the day it was, he played softly 'The Lord's my Shepherd,' and part of a hymn called 'Ye little lambs of Zion,' which he had picked up not long since, one day when lying half sober to leeward of a Methodist prayer-meeting.

An old woman, passing near, heard it, and her heart went out to the poor man.

'Well, well now, an' is that you, Rory M'Alpine?' she said, half kindly, half dubious, because of the drear broken man she saw and his sore plight.

'It is just me an' no other, Widow Sheen,' he answered sadly; 'for sure there's none but God to have pity on a poor man that was travelling hard to see his own kith an' kin afore he died, an' fell down by the way, an' a bad fit at that, with the good pipes smashed too, an' not any tobacco upon him whatever, an' a broken heart to lift along the way.'

Sheen Macgregor was a tender soul, and she knew nothing of what had happened the night

before. She was too old and sad to go to the merry-making.

She was now on her way to the kirk, but she turned and led Rory back to her turf-thatched cottage that was only a butt and a ben. Soon he grew warm before the glowing peats, and was glad to be in the dry clothes that had belonged to old Gregor Macgregor, while his own steamed in the comfortable heat. It was a true word he said when he told Widow Sheen that he had never known porridge like her porridge, or tasted them so sweet and wholesome, and that the milk was like a young cow's at clover-time. For a time he was uneasy, with restless eyes; for he had caught sight of a black bottle on a shelf. But when Sheen had taken it down, and poured him out a good glass of smoky Glenlivet, he praised God aloud, and said with tears in his eyes that his own mother had never been more tender sweet with him.

He had but slight hopes of the good thing; but when the old woman went to the drawers-head and lifted a jar, and filled his pipe for him, his gladness was a gladness indeed. When he lifted a bit of red peat and put it to the bowl of his pipe, and had his mouth and nose filled with the heavy good smoke, there was not a curse left in his heart.

After a time Widow Sheen said she would go now, but he prayed her to give him home a little longer.

'I'm hungry to hear the hymns,' she said simply.

'For sure now, if that's all you'll be hungry for,'

pleaded Rory eagerly, 'I'll play you more hymns in an hour than you'll hear in a week'—and with that (and the more readily, because there were only ashes in the bowl now) he put down his pipe, and took his tin whistle, and played softly by the fire.

Widow Sheen sat and listened. It gave her peace and glad, holy thoughts. And if, after a time, Rory remembered no more hymns, and played old airs of love and sorrowful sweet songs of partings and regrets, the tired old woman did not know, or, knowing, showed no sign, but folded her withered hands on her lap, and closed her eyes, and dreamed old dreams.

After a time Rory saw she slept, so he rose and filled his pipe again. He had filled his pouch, too, when he remembered what he was doing, and put the tobacco back. Two hours passed. Then Widow Sheen waked and bade Rory stay and share her Sabbath stoup of leek broth with part of a neck of mutton in it—a luxury due to Miss Maclellan, who had sent the meat to the old woman, along with a packet of tea, to make up for her absence from the great doings.

That he did gladly, and all afternoon he told her stories. She cared little for any gossip save of Strathraonull, and all the decent* gossip of the region was already known to her; but she loved old tales, and wild uncanny legends of kelpies and water-horses and sea-bulls, of fairy-lovers and solitary walkers in the night, of the green-clad cailleach on the hillside singing her fatal song as she milked the

wild deer, of the bewitched thorns under which folk lay down to awake witless, of horns heard in the moonshine, and strange forlorn music in desolate places, and of what came of these and other omens and perversities. Rory had a good voice, too, and he sang old Gaelic songs; and when by chance he sang 'Mo nighean donn,' and she remembered when she had first heard it, when Gregor her lad wooed her at the summer-sheiling high on Ben Chreagan, her heart gave way, and she rose and kissed Rory.

Then she gave him tea, with as many scones and butter as he could eat, and filled his pouch and gave him a parting glass; and so he went out into the late day, sweet and fragrant now, with quiet light lying on stone and tree and warming the shadows into broad leaves or fans of living dusk.

But for a year thereafter Rory M'Alpine would have nothing to do with Strathraonull. He made many a bitter satire upon it and its folk; and these sayings went round the straths and outlying countries, till the Strathraonull people wished that Mr. Maclellan had just forborne with the poor man, and him in his natural state too, seeing the day it was; or else that he had been drowned in the pool; or that Widow Sheen had left him in the wet open, where as likely as not he would have died of his chill and his broken pipes.

Rory prospered, however, and in Strathanndra it was allowed that the piper had reformed, and was on his way to end his days in peace. He was not

known to be drunk save at the quarters, and there was no scandal except on Martinmas Day, when in the market-place at Fort William he hated the law and hurled his heavy pipes at the head of Sheriff Macdougall, and brought that great and bulky gentleman to the ground like a felled steer.

For a time after the Strathraonull sorrow he had acted as a drover, an old ploy; then Strathanndra himself had given him the post of second shepherd; and if one bad night he had not piped the sheep over a broken ledge into a quarry (it was the Lammas-quarter, and he was enthusiastic), he would have been shepherd still. Since then he had acted as Strathanndra blacksmith in place of Allan Colquhoun, who had broken his leg, and was only too glad to get Rory to take his place and act for him. And when at the New Year Colquhoun celebrated Hogmanay with too great joy, and was found head foremost in a miry boghole, Rory M'Alpine succeeded him as blacksmith, and Strathanndra widows and girls looked on him as a good man and true.

For some weeks Rory worked hard at his fine reputation. But when first the Established man, and then the Free Church man, and then the new-come U.P. man, called and exhorted him, and he had to subscribe to this and subscribe to that, and had made promises to attend each of the kirks, and even to qualify for a communicant, and was finally offered the U.P. precentorship, he became restive, and longed to be up in the hills, or moving from place to place with his pipes.

The change would have come soon or late, but it was the Strathraonull message that brought it near.

When first the word came that Strathraonull was stricken with remorse for what had happened when Rory had last honoured it, the piper snorted like an angry stot. Later, with a big slow wave of his hand, he remarked that it was news to him to learn Strathraonull was still in existence. 'I remember a poor place o' that name,' he said, 'but I thought it had died off, or been bought by a Glasgow man for jam or boot factories, or had emigryated at two-pound-ten a head, an' no thanks when ye get there.'

A second embassy was rebuffed less bitterly. Rory was secretly overjoyed to hear that all Strathraonull was agreed on one point—that there was no piper in the Highlands to surpass Rory M'Alpine, and no teller of old tales to compare with him, and none so welcome of an evening. But he was obdurate. He sent word back that in Strathannandra the folk knew when they were well off, and that he could be a precentor when he liked, and an elder too for the matter o' that, and in any one o' the three kirks: then, fearing that this might go for laughter, and remembering that ill day at Fort William at Martinmas, and the prejudice of the magistracy against him ever since, he added bitterly, 'A poor, poor place Strathraonull! Sure it has only one gentleman in it, an' that's a woman—old Widow Sheen Macgregor——'

But (apart from his own great longing to go back there, 'the strath of his love,' as he called it in one •

of his own songs, and dear to him for many things) two happenings moved him at last.

First there came word from Donald Macalister of Dalibrog, and that meant much, for Dalibrog was his foster-brother. That is an intimate tender bond ; of old, and here and there still, it is a tie closer than blood. 'Fuil gu fhead, comhaltas gu ceud,' as the saying is : 'Blood to the twentieth, fostership to the hundredth degree.'

So that when Donald Macalister wrote affectionately, and addressed him as *comhalta*, Rory's heart melted, and he would have gone to Dalibrog gladly, if only he had not to pass through Strathraonull to get there. 'There are two I want to see, an' badly,' he muttered often : 'my foster-brother and Sheen Macgregor.' Every quarter-day (or as soon after it as he was sober) he had sent Widow Sheen a small packet of tea and tobacco, and the old woman had remembered him gratefully at the New Year, and had sent him a pair of thick hose she had knitted, and a ramshorn mull filled with black snuff that had belonged to her man.

As he could not read or write, and would not own to either lack, he had to wait on opportunity ; so that days passed, and Donald Macalister wrote again and urged him by the good bond of *comhaltas* to come to Dalibrog and help make the christening festivities a time for remembrance indeed. •

He had received and become acquainted with this second letter, when Peter Macfarlane and Thomas M'Hardy arrived in the carrier's cart at the smithy,

and gave Rory one of the proudest moments in his life. For they brought with them a beautiful new set of pipes, with silver flutings, and decked with streamers of M'Alpine tartan, and handed the brave pipes to Rory as a present from the whole of Strathraonull, and as a sign of repentance.

They took back word next day (for that night all three were too overcome with drinking healths, now to Strathraonull, and now to Strathannandra, to stir from the smithy) that Rory M'Alpine was coming to Dalibrog for the christening, and that there was not a man or woman in the Strath but that he would be glad to see again, and that he had not a sour memory left against any one, except for that poor fool of a man, John Macmillan the carpenter (the only man in the Strath who had not subscribed to the new set of pipes), and not that either, seeing the poor home he had with the scolding wife an' a heavy cold in his head three parts o' the year. As for the Reverend Kenneth Maclellan, he had had a call from the Lord, and now preached the Word (at a higher stipend) in the town of Greenock.

II

There never was a finer St. Bride's Eve in the Highlands than that which saw the return of Rory M'Alpine.

He came down by the Pass of the Lochans, at the eastern end of Strathraonull, and long before he was

seen the crofters at Creggans could hear the wild pibroch he was playing. A handsome, strapping man he was always; but now he was Piper Rory M'Alpine, and came striding down the pass with his pipes on his left shoulder and skreigh upon skreigh skirling from his chanter and big drone, with the tartan streamers flying in the wind, and himself with a new jacket of braided velveteen with silver buttons and clasps, a new kilt and philabeg, new hose of his own clan, with slit and deckled shoes agleam with silver buckles, a great plaid of the finest woven M'Alpine tartan round his big chest and over and away beyond his shoulder, where sat the largest brooch in the Highlands with a yellow cairngorm in it that was like a lump of solid sunlight, and a new cap of the Glengarry men with a sprig of heather held by a silver clasp, which held also two big wing-feathers of the golden eagle.

The whole of Creggans came to the roadside to welcome the glad stranger. He looked at none; but when, still playing his new pibroch, he reached the space in front of the 'Crossways Inn,' he strode backwards and forwards, or stood tapping the ground with his right foot, till the glory and greatness of the man were too overcoming to be borne, and there was a rush of M'Dermids and M'Ians (for every one at Creggans was either a M'Ian or a M'Dermid), and they carried him, just as a running wave sweeps a bit of driftwood, into the laughing gape of the inn.

And what Creggans did, every hamlet along Strath-

raonull did or tried to do. But as he neared Dalibrog village, Rory became more and more circumspect as to the kindly drink, and so entered the place of his old shame and new triumph with no more in him than what went for comfort. Every man, woman, and child came out to greet him ; and what with their laughing glad cries, and shoutings to each other, and the squealing of children and barking of dogs, and the wild ceaseless drone of the pipes and skirling cries that screamed from the chanter, there was noise enough to make the dead in Dalibrog kirkyard wonder if the last trump had sounded, and they not knowing it because of the heavy sleep on them.

It was a triumph indeed, and none ever had a welcome more true. For not only had Rory sent a brave word of thanks for the Strathraonull repentance, and made a beautiful new pibroch (which between Candlemas and Lammas would reach every hamlet in the Highlands from the Mull of Cantyre to the Ord of Sutherland) called ' Strathraonull for Ever ! ' and had publicly repudiated, too, every curse and ill word he had put on the Strath and the men and women in it ; but it was also known that in order to come here in all this glory he had sold the smithy rights to Andrew M'Andrew, the Aberdeen man who had been spying for work in Strathannandra, and was now Piper Rory M'Alpine again, and that and no other.

When he spoke at last, it was like a prince, very cordial and kind.

' Well, well, now,' he said, ' for sure I see well I'm

in dear Strathraonull again. Sure I've never ceased to love it, or the folk within it, and where my heart's been my thoughts have been.'

There was a cheer at that, though every man and woman there knew it was a black lie. But perhaps not that either, and only a good friendly lie.

'It's Macalister land indeed,' Rory added laughingly; for as he glanced about him, he saw that two-thirds at least of the company were of Mhic Alastair. 'Sure we might all as well be in the Isles out yonder'—this in allusion to the fact that some generations ago a number of islesmen (Macleans and Macneils with a few Macdonalds and others) had left the Hebrides and settled on the main, and adopted the clan-name of Macalister because of a famous chieftain whom all claimed as their common ancestor, one Alasdair the Red of Storsay; a matter needless to mention here, were it not that in the region spoken of the people still adhere to certain customs that are Hebridean rather than of the mainland, and of the Southern and Catholic isles at that.

Only too gladly William Macalister of the 'Raonull Arms' would have had Rory as his free guest (and this in despite of all painful memory of the shallowness of the piper's purse in comparison with his deep quenchless thirst); but, as was everywhere understood, he had, of course, to go on to Dalibrog House. But he drank abundant goodwill first.

Dalibrog himself was not an expansive man, but with Rory his *codalt* he was more cordial than with any other, and had as much affection for him and

pleasure in his company as he had in that of any living being after himself; and the more so as Rory never asked anything of him, save bed and board, gladly given, and was, moreover, of poor and humble estate as compared with Donald Macalister of Dalibrog.

But neither Dalibrog nor his wife, nor his old half-sister Dionaïd (who still had the Island Gaelic, she having come from Barra in her early womanhood), were pleased when they saw that Rory had already been so eager to show Strathraonull that it had his whole-hearted forgiveness, for he carried too obviously the signs of that repentance and his own overwilling meeting of it more than half-way. It was too wild a tune that he played as he came up Dalibrog House avenue, with a broken crowd at his heels, and himself hating so many uncertain trees running at him, and he trying to play at one and the same time 'The Cock of the North' and 'Deil tak' the Hindmost.'

Rory, however, would not hear a word of reproach, and insisted that he had never been so well in his life, save for a bit of a rheum he had got as he came down the cold pass of the Lochans; and that it would go soon, and quicker too for the help of some good warm broth and a mouthful of something with it (Glenlivet for choice), for he had not touched bite or sup since a slop of porridge and milk at daybreak.

'Well, as ye've enough breath for that lie, I suppose you'll have to reach the end o' your ain gate.'

said Dalibrog drily, and speaking the Lowland tongue to show his displeasure.

However, Rory recovered for a time, and by three of the clock was in a deep sleep in the loft beyond the kitchen, where Dionaid Macalister had given him all he wanted and more. The christening was over and the minister gone before he came out of that sleep, to the thankful content of all concerned.

Meanwhile the St. Bride preparations were carried swiftly on.

The young women of the neighbourhood had already made a fine image of a woman out of woven corn-sheafs, and had clothed this with the best that could be had; and because of the mildness of the winter they had been able to gather many snow-drops and aconites and early daisies, and even primroses and daffodils, and so made the figure of St. Bride like a delight of spring. With brightly-tinted snail shells, and with polished pebbles, and red bramble leaves and golden bracken fronds which had been carefully preserved from October, and with many little ornaments, 'our Brideag dear' was made fair to see.

As soon as the ceremony was over and the great folk gone with the Laird's carriages, the *banal Bride* (the maiden band of St. Bridget) went in procession from cottage to cottage and from house to house. All were young girls, dressed in white, and with their hair down; and as they carried the figure among them, they sang the song of 'Bride bhoidheach oigh

nam mile beus' ('Beautiful young Bridget of a thousand charms'); and because none let St. Bride go without an offering, the figure was soon covered with shells and ribbons and flowers and little fineries of all kinds—and many besides gave presents of cheese and cakes and honey, to be given in turn to the poor of the neighbourhood.

When they came to Dalibrog House, old Dionaid Macalister (who many years before was mainly responsible for the St. Bride celebrations in Strathraonull) put a fine white cairngorm in a silver sheath over the heart of the image of St. Bride, which, she said, was for the 'reul iuil Bride,' the guiding star of St. Bridget—that star over the stable at Bethlehem which led St. Bride to the Virgin Mother and her little new-born Son, and made her known and loved for ever as 'Bride nam brat,' St. Bride of the Mantle, for the good deed she did then.

Having ended at Dalibrog, the *banal Bride* made the circuit of the house, and then went to the new byres that had been made ready for the feast, and in the third installed Bridget, 'Bride bhoidheach oigh,' and near the great window where she could be seen of all. Then having barred the doors, they awaited the coming of the other young men and women from the Strath. They came in twos and threes and larger groups; but because most were Protestants, and not of the old faith, and inlanders too, there were songs unsung and prayers unprayed that should have been sung and prayed; nor did more than a few of the young men make obeisance before Bride as they

should have done, she being the friend of Mary and the foster-mother of Christ.

After this there was much eating and drinking, though not so much as there seemed, for each put aside something to the common table that was reserved for what was afterwards to be distributed to the poor.

Then the dancing began, and now Rory M'Alpine was again the foremost figure, for there was none in all the home straths or the countries beyond who had so great a store of reels and strathspeys.

He played with magic and pleasure, and had never looked handsomer, in his new grandeur of clothes, and with his ruddy hair aflame in the torch-light, and his big blue eyes shining as with a lifting, shifting fire. But those who knew him best saw that he was strangely subdued for Rory M'Alpine, or at least, that he laughed and shouted (in the rare intervals when he was not playing, and there were two other pipers present to help the Master) more by custom than from the heart.

'What is't, Rory?' said Dalibrog to him, after a heavy reel wherein he had nearly killed a man by swinging upon and nigh flattening him against the wall.

'Nothing, foster-brother dear; it's just nothing at all. Fling away, Dalibrog; you're doing fine.'

Later old Dionaid took him aside to bid him refresh himself from a brew of rum and lemons she had made, with spice and a flavour of old brandy—

‘Barra Punch’ she called it—and then asked him if he had any sorrow at the back of his heart.

‘Just this,’ he said in a whisper, ‘that Rory M’Alpine’s fëy.’

‘Fëy, my lad, an’ for why that? For, sure, I’m thinking it’s fëy with the good drink you have had all day, an’ now here am I spoiling ye with more.’

‘Hush, woman; I’m not speaking of what comes wi’ a drop to the bad. But I had a dream, I had; a powerful strange dream, for sure. I had it a month ago; I had it the night before I left Strath-anndra; and I had it this very day of the days, as I lay sleepin’ off the kindness I had since I came into Strathraonull.’

‘An’ what will that dream be, now?’

‘Sure, it’s a strange dream, Dionaid Macalister. You know the great yellow stone that rises out of the heather on the big moor of Dalmonadh, a mile or more beyond Tom-na-shee?’

‘Ay, the Moonrock they call it; it that fell out o’ the skies, they say.’

‘The Yellow Moonrock. Ay, the Yellow Moonrock; that’s its name, for sure. Well, the first time I dreamed of it I saw it standing fair yellow in the moonshine. There was a moorfowl sitting on it, and it flew away. When it flew away I saw it was a ptarmigan, but she was as clean brown as though it were summer and not midwinter, and I thought that strange.’

‘How did you know it was a ptarmigan? It might have been a moorhen or a——’

‘Hoots, woman, how do I know when it’s wet or fine, when it’s day or night? Well, as I was saying, I thought it strange; but I hadn’t turned over that thought on its back before it was gone like the shadow o’ a peewit, and I saw standing before me the beautifulest woman I ever saw in all my life. I’ve had sweethearts here and sweethearts there, Dionaid-nic-Tormod, and long ago I loved a lass who died, Sine MacNeil; but not one o’ these, nor sweet Sine herself, was like the woman I saw in my dream, who had more beauty upon her than them altogether, or than all the women in Strathraonull and Strathann dra.’

‘Have some more Barra punch, Rory,’ said Miss Macalister drily.

‘Whist, ye old fule, begging your pardon for that same. She was as white as new milk, an’ her eyes were as dark as the two black pools below Annora Linn, an’ her hair was as long an’ wavy as the shadows o’ a willow in the wind; an’ she sat an’ she sang, an’ if I could be remembering that song now it’s my fortune I’d be making, an’ that quick too.’

‘And where was she?’

‘Why, on the Moonrock, for sure. An’ if I hadn’t been a good Christian I’d have bowed down before her, because o’—because—well, because o’ that big stare out of her eyes she had, an’ the beauty of her, an’ all. An’ what’s more, by the Black Stone of Iona, if I hadn’t been a God-fearin’ man I’d have run to her, an’ put my arms round her, an’ kissed the

honey lips of her till she cried out, "For the Lord's sake, Rory M'Alpine, leave off!"

'It's well seen you were only in a dream, Rory M'Alpine.'

At another time Rory would have smiled at that, but now he just stared.

'She said no word,' he added, 'but lifted a bit of hollow wood or thick reed. An' then all at once she whispered, "I'm bonnie St. Bride of the Mantle," an' wi' that she began to play, an' it was the finest sweet, gentle, little music in the world. But a big fear was on me, an' I just turned an' ran.'

'No man 'll ever call ye a fool again to my face, Rory M'Alpine. I never had the thought you had so much sense.'

'She didna let me run so easy, for a grey bitch went yapping and yowling at my heels; an' just as I tripped an' felt the bad hot breath of the beast at my throat, I woke, an' was wet wi' sweat.'

'An' you've had that dream three times?'

'I've had it three times, and this very day, to the stones be it said. Now, you're a wise woman, Dionaid Macalister, but can you tell me what that dream means?'

'If you're really fëy, I'm thinking I can, Rory M'Alpine.'

'It's a true thing: Himself knows it.'

'And what are you fëy of?'

'I'm fëy with the beauty o' that woman.'

'There's good women wi' the fair looks on them'

in plenty, Rory ; an' if you prefer them bad, you needna wear out new shoon before you'll find them.'

'I'm fëy wi' the beauty o' that woman. I'm fëy wi' the beauty o' that woman that had the name o' Bride to her.'

Dionaid Macalister looked at him with troubled eyes.

'When she took up the reed, did you see anything that frightened you?'

'Ay. I had a bit fright when I saw a big black adder slip about the moonrock as the ptarmigan flew off ; an' I had the other half o' that fright when I thought the woman lifted the adder, but it was only wood or a reed, for amn't I for telling you about the gentle sweet music I heard?'

Old Dionaid hesitated ; then, looking about her to see that no one was listening, she spoke in a whisper—

'An' you've been fëy since that hour because o' the beauty o' that woman?'

'Because o' the sore beauty o' that woman.'

'An' it's not the drink?'

'No, no, Dionaid Macalister. You women are always for hurting the feelins o' the drink. It is not the innycent drink, I am telling you ; for sure, no ; no, no, it is not the drink.'

'Then I'll tell you what it means, Rory M'Alpine. It wasn't Holy St. Bride——'

'I know that, ye old——, I mean, Miss Macalister.'

'It was the face of the *Bhean-Nimhir* you saw, the

face of *Nighean-Imhir*, an' this is St. Bride's Night, an' it is on this night of the nights she can be seen, an' beware o' that seeing, Rory M'Alpine.'

'The *Bean-Nimhir*, the *Nighean-Imhir* . . . the Serpent Woman, the Daughter of Ivor——' muttered Rory; 'where now have I heard tell o' the Daughter of Ivor?' Then he remembered an old tale of the isles, and his heart sank, because the tale was of a woman of the underworld who could suck the soul out of a man through his lips, and send it to slavery among the people of ill-will, whom there is no call to speak of by name; and if she had any spite, or any hidden wish that is not for our knowing, she could put the littleness of a fly's bite on the hollow of his throat, and take his life out of his body, and nip it and sting it till it was no longer a life, and till that went away on the wind that she chased with screams and laughter.

'Some say she's the wife of the Amadan-Dhu, the Dark Fool,' murmured Dionaid, crossing herself furtively, for even at Dalibrog it was all Protestantry now.

But Rory was not listening. He sat intent, for he heard music—a strange music.

Dionaid shook him by the shoulder.

'Wake up, Rory, man; you'll be having sleep on you in another minute.'

Just then a loud calling for the piper was heard, and Rory went back to the dancers. Soon his pipes were heard, and the reels swung to that good glad music, and his face lighted up as he strode to and

fro, or stopped and tap-tapped away with his right foot, while drone and chanter all but burst with the throng of sound in them.

But suddenly he began to play a reel that nigh maddened him, and his own face was wrought so that Dalibrog came up and signed to stop, and then asked him what in the name o' Black Donald he was playing.

Rory laughed foolishly.

'Oh, for sure, it's just a new reel o' my own. I call it "The Reel of Ivor's Daughter." An' a good reel it is too, although it's Rory M'Alpine says it.'

'Who is she, an' what Ivor will you be speaking of?'

'Oh, ask the Amadan-Dhu; it's he will be knowing that. No, no, now, I will not be naming it that name; sure, I will call it instead the Serpent-Reel.'

'Come, now, Rory, you've played enough, an' if your wrist's not tired wi' the chanter, sure, it must be wi' lifting the drink to your lips. An' it's time, too, these lads an' lasses were off.'

'No, no, they're waiting to bring in the greying of the day—St. Bride's Day. They'll be singing the hymn for that greying, "Bride bhoidheach muime Chriosda."'

'Not they, if Dalibrog has a say in it! Come, now, have a drink with me, your own foster-brother, an' then lie down an' sleep it off, an' God's good blessing be on you.'

Whether it was Dalibrog's urgency, or the thought of the good drink he would have, and he with a

terrible thirst on him after that lung-bursting reel of his, Rory went quietly away with the host, and was on a mattress on the floor of a big empty room, and snoring hard, long before the other pipers had ceased piping, or the last dancers flung their panting breaths against the frosty night.

III

An hour after midnight Rory woke with a start. He had 'a spate of a headache on,' he muttered, as he half rose and struck a match against the floor. When he saw that he was still in his brave gear, and had lain down 'just as he was,' and also remembered all that had happened and the place he was in, he wondered what had waked him.

Now that he thought of it, he had heard music: yes, for sure, music—for all that it was so late, and after every one had gone home. What was it? It was not any song of his own, nor any air he had. He must have dreamed that it came across great lonely moors, and had a sigh and a laugh and a sudden cry in it.

He was cold. The window was open. That was a stupid, careless thing of Donald Macalister to do, and he sober, as he always was, though he could drink deep; on a night of frost like this Death could slip in on the back of a shadow and get his whisper in your ear before you could rise for the stranger.

He stumbled to his feet and closed the window. Then he lay down again, and was nearly asleep, and

was confused between an old prayer that rose in his mind like a sunken spar above a wave ; and whether to take Widow Sheen a packet of great thick Sabbath peppermints, or a good heavy twist of tobacco ; and a strange delightful memory of Dionaid Macalister's brew of rum and lemons with a touch of old brandy in it ; when again he heard that little, wailing, fantastic air, and sat up with the sweat on his brow.

The sweat was not there only because of the little thin music he heard, and it the same, too, as he had heard before ; but because the window was wide open again, though the room was so heavy with silence that the pulse of his heart made a noise like a jumping rat.

Rory sat, as still as though he were dead, staring at the window. He could not make out whether the music was faint because it was so far away, or because it was played feebly, like a child's playing, just under the sill.

He was a big, strong man, but he leaned and wavered like the flame of a guttering candle in that slow journey of his from the mattress to the window. He could hear the playing now quite well. It was like the beautiful sweet song of 'Bride bhoidheach muime Chriosda,' but with the holy peace out of it, and with a little, evil, hidden laugh flapping like a wing against the blessed name of Christ's foster-mother. But when it sounded under the window, it suddenly was far ; and when it was far, the last circling peewit-lilt would be at his ear like a skiffing bat.

When he looked out, and felt the cold night lie on his skin, he could not see because he saw too well. He saw the shores of the sky filled with dancing lights, and the great lighthouse of the moon sending a foam-white stream across the delicate hazes of frost which were too thin to be seen, and only took the sharp edges off the stars, or sometimes splintered them into sudden dazzle. He was like a man in a sailless, rudderless boat, looking at the skies because he lay face upward and dared not stoop and look into the dark slipping water alongside.

He saw, too, the horn-like curve of Tom-na-shee black against the blueness, and the inky line of Dalmonadh Moor beyond the plummy mass of Dalibrog woods, and the near meadows where a leveret jumped squealing, and then the bare garden with ragged gooseberry-bushes like scraggy, forlorn hunched sheep, and at last the white gravel-walk bordered with the withered roots of pinks and southernwood.

Then he looked from all these great things and these little things to the ground beneath the window. There was nothing there. There was no sound. Not even far away could he hear any faint devilish music. At least——

Rory shut the window, and went back to his mattress and lay down.

‘By the sun an’ wind,’ he exclaimed, ‘a man gets fear on him nowadays, like a cold in the head when a thaw comes.’

Then he lay and whistled a blithe catch. For

sure, he thought, he would rise at dawn and drown that thirst of his in whatever came first to hand.

Suddenly he stopped whistling, and on the uplift of a lilting turn. In a moment the room was full of old silence again.

Rory turned his head slowly. The window was wide open.

A sob died in his throat. He put his hands to his dry mouth; the back of it was wet with the sweat on his face.

White and shaking, he rose and walked steadily to the window. He looked out and down: there was no one, nothing.

He pulled the ragged cane chair to the sill, and sat there, silent and hopeless.

Soon big tears fell one by one, slowly, down his face. He understood now. His heart filled with sad, bitter grief, and brimmed over, and that was why the tears fell.

It was his hour that had come and opened the window.

He was cold, and as faint with hunger and heavy with thirst as though he had not put a glass to his lips or a bit to his mouth for days instead of for hours; but for all that, he did not feel ill, and he wondered and wondered why he was to die so soon, and he so well-made and handsome, and unmarried too, and now with girls as eager to have him as trouts for a may fly.

And after a time Rory began to dream of that great beauty that had troubled his dreams; and

while he thought of it, and the beautiful sweet wonder of the woman who had it, she whom he had seen sitting in the moonshine on the yellow rock, he heard again the laughing, crying, fall and lilt of that near and far song. But now it troubled him no more.

He stooped, and swung himself out of the window, and at the noise of his feet on the gravel a dog barked. He saw a white hound running swiftly across the pasture beyond him. It was gone in a moment, so swiftly did it run. He heard a second bark, and knew that it came from the old deerhound in the kennel. He wondered where that white hound he had seen came from, and where it was going, and it silent and white and swift as a moonbeam, with head low and in full sleuth.

He put his hand on the sill, and climbed into the room again; lifted the pipes which he or Donald Macalister had thrown down beside the mattress; and again, but stealthily, slipped out of the window.

Rory walked to the deerhound and spoke to it. The dog whimpered, but barked no more. When the piper walked on, and had gone about a score yards, the old hound threw back his head and gave howl upon howl, long and mournful. The cry went from stead to stead; miles and miles away the farm-dogs answered.

Perhaps it was to drown their noise that Rory began to finger his pipes, and at last let a long drone go out like a great humming cockchafer on the blue frosty stillness of the night. The drofters at Moor

Edge heard his pibroch as he walked swiftly along the road that leads to Dalmonadh Moor. Some thought it was uncanny; some that one of the pipers had lost his way, or made an early start; one or two wondered if Rory M'Alpine were already on the move, like a hare that could not be long in one form.

The last house was the gamekeeper's, at Dalmonadh Toll, as it was still called. Duncan Grant related next day that he was wakened by the skreigh of the pipes, and knew them for Rory M'Alpine's by the noble masterly fashion in which drone and chanter gave out their music, and also because that music was the strong, wild, fearsome reel that Rory had played last in the byres, that which he had called 'The Reel of the Daughter of Ivor.'

'At that,' he added, each time he told the tale, 'I rose and opened the window, and called to M'Alpine. "Rory," I cried, "is that you?"'

"Ay," he said, stopping short, an' giving the pipes a lilt. "Ay, it's me an' no other, Duncan Grant."

"I thought ye would be sleeping sound at Dalibrog?"

'But Rory made no answer to that, and walked on. I called to him in the English: "Dinna go out on the moor, Rory! Come in, man, an' have a sup o' hot porridge an' a mouthful with them." But he never turned his head; an' as it was cold an' dark, I said to myself that doited fools must gang their ain gate, an' so turned an' went to my bed again, though I hadn't a wink so long as I could hear Rory playing.'

But Duncan Grant was not the last man who heard 'The Reel of the Daughter of Ivor.'

A mile or more across Dalmonadh Moor the heather-set road forks. One way is the cart-way to Balnaree; the other is the drover's way to Tom-nashie and the hill countries beyond. It is up this, a mile from the fork, that the Yellow Moonrock rises like a great fang out of purple lips. Some say it is of granite, and some marble, and that it is an old cromlech of the forgotten days; others that it is an unknown substance, a meteoric stone believed to have fallen from the moon.

Not near the Moonrock itself, but five score yards or more away, and perhaps more ancient still, there is a group of three lesser fang-shaped boulders of trap, one with illegible runic writing or signs. These are familiar to some as the Stannin' Stanes; to others, who have the Gaelic, as the Stone Men, or simply as the Stones, or the Stones of Dalmonadh. None knows anything certain of this ancient cromlech, though it is held by scholars to be of Pictish times.

Here a man known as Peter Lamont, though commonly as Peter the Tinker, an idle, homeless vagrant, had taken shelter from the hill-wind which had blown earlier in the night, and had heaped a bed of dry bracken. He was asleep when he heard the wail and hum of the pipes.

He sat up in the shadow of one of the Stones. By the stars he saw that it was still the black of the night, and that dawn would not be astir for three

hours or more. Who could be playing the pipes in that lonely place at that hour?

The man was superstitious, and his fears were heightened by his ignorance of what the unseen piper played (and Peter the Tinker prided himself on his knowledge of pipe music) and by the strangeness of it. He remembered, too, where he was. There was not one in a hundred who would lie by night among the Stannin' Stanes, and he had himself been driven to it only by heavy weariness and fear of death from the unsheltered cold. But not even that would have made him lie near the Moonrock. He shivered as memories of wild stories rose ghastly one after the other.

The music came nearer. The tinker crawled forward, and hid behind the Stone next the path, and cautiously, under a tuft of bracken, stared in the direction whence the sound came.

He saw a tall man striding along in full Highland gear, with his face death-white in the moonshine, and his eyes glazed like those of a leistered salmon. It was not till the piper was close that Lamont recognised him as Rory M'Alpine.

He would have spoken—and gladly, in that lonely place, to say nothing of the curiosity that was on him—had it not been for those glazed eyes and that set, death-white face. The man was fëy. He could see that. It was all he could do not to leap away like a rabbit.

Rory M'Alpine passed him, and played till he was close on the Moonrock. Then he stopped and

listened, leaning forward as though straining his eyes to see into the shadow.

He heard nothing, saw nothing, apparently. Slowly he waved a hand across the heather.

Then suddenly the piper began a rapid talking. Peter the Tinker could not hear what he said, perhaps because his own teeth chattered with the fear that was on him. Once or twice Rory stretched his arms, as though he were asking something, as though he were pleading.

Suddenly he took a step or two forward, and in a loud, shrill voice cried—

‘By Holy St. Bride, let there be peace between us, white woman !

‘I do not fear you, white woman, because I too am of the race of Ivor :

‘My father’s father was the son of Ivor mhic Alpein, the son of Ivor the Dark, the son of Ivor Honeymouth, the son of Ruairidh, the son of Ruairidh the Red, of the straight unbroken line of Ivor the King :

‘I will do you no harm, and you will do me no harm, white woman :

‘This is the Day of Bride, the day for the daughter of Ivor. It is Rory M’Alpine who is here, of the race of Ivor. I will do you no harm, and you will do me no harm :

‘Sure, now, it was you who sang. It was you who sang. It was you who played. It was you who opened my window :

‘It was you who came to me in a dream, daughter

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of Ivor. It was you who put your beauty upon me. Sure, it is that beauty that is my death, and I hungering and thirsting for it.'

Having cried thus, Rory stood, listening, like a crow on a furrow when it sees the wind coming.

The tinker, trembling, crept a little nearer. There was nothing, no one. •

Suddenly Rory began singing in a loud, chanting, monotonous voice—

'An diugh La' Bride
Thig nighean Imhir as a chnoc,
Cha bhean mise do nighean Imhir,
'S cha bhean Imhir dhomh.'

(To-day the day of Bride,
The daughter of Ivor shall come from the knoll ;
I will not touch the daughter of Ivor,
Nor shall the daughter of Ivor touch me.)

Then, bowing low, with fantastic gestures, and with the sweep of his plaid making a shadow like a flying cloud, he sang again—

'La' Bride nam brig ban
Thig an rígen ran a tom
Cha bhoin mise ris an rígen ran,
'S cha bhoin an rígen ran ruim.'

(On the day of Bride of the fair locks,
The noble queen will come from the hill ;
I will not molest the noble queen,
Nor will the noble queen molest me.)

'An' I, too, Nighean Imhir,' he cried in a voice more loud, more shrill, more plaintive yet, 'will be doing now what our own great forebear did, when

he made *tabhartas agus tuis* to you, so that neither he nor his seed for ever should die of you; an' I too, Ruaridh MacDhonnell mhic Alpein, will make offering and incense.' And with that Rory stepped back, and lifted the pipes, and flung them at the base of the Yellow Moonrock, where they caught on a jagged spar and burst with a great wailing screech that made the hair rise on the head of Peter the Tinker, where he crouched sick with the white fear.

'That for my *tabhartas*,' Rory cried again, as though he were calling to a multitude; 'an' as I've no *tuis*, an' the only incense I have is the smoke out of my pipe, take the pipe an' the tobacco too, an' it's all the smoke I have or am ever like to have now, an' as good incense too as any other, daughter of Ivor.'

Suddenly Peter Lamont heard a thin, strange, curling, twisting bit of music, so sweet for all its wildness that cold and hunger went below his heart. It grew louder, and he shook with fear. But when he looked at Rory M'Alpine, and saw him springing to and fro in a dreadful reel, and snapping his fingers and flinging his arms up and down like flails, he could stand no more, but with a screech rose and turned across the heather, and fluttered and fell and fell and fluttered like a wounded snipe.

He lay still once, after a bad fall, for his breath was like a thistledown blown this way and that above his head. It was on a heathery knoll, and he could see the Moonrock yellow-white in the moonshine.

The savage lilt of that jigging wild air still rang in his ears, with never a sweetness in it now, though when he listened it grew fair and lightsome, and put a spell of joy and longing in him. But he could see nothing of Rory.

He stumbled to his knees and stared. There was something on the road.

He heard a noise as of men struggling. But all he saw was Rory M'Alpine swaying and swinging, now up and now down; and then at last the piper was on his back in the road and tossing like a man in a fit, and screeching with a dreadful voice, 'Let me go! let me go! Take your lips off my mouth! take your lips off my mouth!'

Then, abruptly, there was no sound, but only a dreadful silence; till he heard a rush of feet, and heard the heather-sprigs break and crack, and something went past him like a flash of light.

With a scream he flung himself down the heather knoll, and ran like a driven hare till he came to the white road beyond the moor; and just as dawn was breaking, he fell in a heap at the byre-edge at Dalmonadh Toll, and there Duncan Grant found him an hour later, white and senseless still.

Neither Duncan Grant nor any one else believed Peter Lamont's tale, but at noon the tinker led a reluctant few to the Yellow Moonrock.

The broken pipes still hung on the jagged spar at the base. Half on the path and half on the heather was the body of Rory M'Alpine. He was all but naked to the waist, and his plaid and jacket

were as torn and ragged as Lamont's own, and the bits were scattered far and wide. His lips were blue and swelled. In the hollow of his hairy, twisted throat was a single drop of black blood.

'It's an adder's bite,' said Duncan Grant.

None spoke.

THE HOUSE OF SAND AND FOAM

WHEN Moira Campbell heard that the man whom she loved and had trusted was to marry the Lady Silis Grant, she left the manse, and went to the linn where the mountain torrent and the glen stream meet.

She sat a long time watching two sulphur butterflies dancing in the sunshine over the clumps of yellow iris which grew on the narrow sandy shores of the river just below the linn. Then she watched a dragon-fly flash like a tiny green and purple arrow from pool to pool. She wondered if it was going to be an early and hot August since the rowan-berries were already bronze, and even here and there scarlet.

Then she remembered that Neil Cameron had written that he was to be married soon. Had he not her troth, she his? She could not understand how such a thing could be. Only a few weeks ago she had told him, there, in that very place, that she had that noon been suddenly startled by the first stir of an all but undreamed-of yet half-dreaded life within. It was here, in this very place, that he had first spoken to her of love. There were a few white clouds that day, and a windhover poisoning above

a scurrying partridge brood; and the wind turned over the whites of the willow-leaves: she remembered these, and all else.

The strangest thing was that she did not greatly care; that she did not feel. Once, long, long ago, years upon years upon years back it seemed to her, she could remember how sweet it was. She could remember, but she could not feel.

What had happened? Was that killed within her which, once killed, could not live again? Was her soul dead? How could so great a thing—or was it so little a thing, a little wind-worn flame—be so soon, so quickly slain?

She was the same, and yet not the same. Her dress was the same as she wore yesterday; the white kerchief . . . no, she had worn a cherry ribbon at her neck yesterday; and the two tea-roses at the hollow of her neck were fresh plucked, and in her breast, under her dress, was Neil's letter.

How clearly and simply men could write! She smiled, and then looked, startled, at the linn. Why did she smile, she wondered: she forgot.

It was easy for men to say this, to say that. What did truth mean? Her father had often said there was but one truth. It was an easy burden, her heart, now that it was broken. She wondered if all women with broken hearts were like that—she simply did not feel.

Once, when the blind life within her moved, she rose, and stared across the hills with fierce steel-blue eyes. What was it; what was all this bitter cruel

wrong done to women, to her, by men, by . . . by . . . Neil?

A ewe wandered by. A white fluffy lambkin bustled up with a whinnying bleat and tugged at the ready udder.

'Poor little thing!' Moira muttered, then wondered why she thought so, or cared.

She was tired. She did not want to think. Did Neil remember *all* when he wrote?

Soon she was asleep. It was noon when she woke, because of the confused angry hum of a wild-bee tangled in her long sun-brown hair, which had become loosened. She fastened the warm tresses, and flushed at she knew not what. There were too many eyes everywhere. Her breasts felt strained, and hurt her; the roses had too heavy an odour. She rose and looked at the linn. Why was it that circling water made her drowsy? She stared about her, and again a deep flush waved into her pale face. There were too many eyes everywhere: little daisy-eyes, and behind the green fronds of the bracken, and in every little dancing leaf on ash and birch.

When they found her, in the afternoon, on the white sandy reaches tufted with yellow iris, she had been bruised by the brown surging tumult of the linn. In the afternoon shine the foam-bells in her hair, where she lay half in half out of the stream, were filled with lovely rainbow-gleams, azure and opal and sudden gold, with little wild-rose flames, breaths of a moment.

LOST

I HAD heard of Mànus Macleod before I met him, a year or more ago, in the South Isles. He had a tragic history. The younger *fiùran* of the younger branch of a noble family, he was born and bred in poverty. At twenty he was studying for the priesthood; nearly two years later he met Margred Colquhoun; when he was twenty-two he was ordained; in his twenty-third year love carried him away as on a strong and bitter tide; the next, he was unfrocked; the next again, Margred was dead, and her child too, and Mànus was a wandering, broken man.

He joined, after some years, wherein he made a living none knows how, a band of gypsies. They were not tinkers, but of the Romany clan, the *Treubh-Sinbhail* or Wandering Race. He married a girl of that people, who was drowned while crossing the great ford of Uist; for she fell in the dusk, and was not seen, and the incoming tide took her while a swoon held her life below the heart. It was about this time that he became known as Mànus-am-Bard, Manus the poet, because of his songs, and his Cruit-Spànteach or guitar, which had belonged to

the girl, and upon which she had taught him to play fantastic savage airs out of the East.

He must have been about forty when he became an outcast from the Romanies. I do not know the reason, but one account seems not improbable: that, in a drunken fit, he had tried to kill and had blinded Gillanders Caird, the brother of the girl whom he had lost.

Thereafter he became an idle and homeless tramp, a suspect even, but sometimes welcome because of his songs and music. A few years later he was known as Father Mànus, head of a dirty wandering tribe of tinkers. He lived in the open, slept in a smoky, ill-smelling tent, had a handsome, evil, dishevelled woman as his mate, and three brown, otter-eyed offspring of his casual love.

It was at this period that a lawyer from Inveraray sought him out, and told him that because of several deaths he had become heir to the Earldom of Hydallan: and asked if he would give up his vagrant life and make ready for the great change of estate which was now before him.

Mànus Macleod took the short, black cutty out of his mouth. 'Come here, Dougal,' he cried to one of his staring boys. The boy had a dead cockerel in his hands, and was plucking it. • 'Tell the gentleman, Dougal, where you got that.'

The boy answered sullenly that it was one o' dad's fowls.

'You lie,' said his father; 'speak out, or I'll slit your tongue fôr you.'

'Well, then, for sure, I lifted it from Farmer Jamie-son's henyard; an' by the same token ye ca'ed me to do it.'

Mànus looked at the lawyer.

'Now, ye've seen me, an' you've seen my eldest brat. Go back an' tell my Lord Hydallan what you've seen. If he dies, I'll be Earl of Hydallan, an' that evil-eyed thief there would be Master of Carndhu, an' my heir, if only he wasn't the bastard he is. An' neither now nor then will I change my way of life. Hydallan Chase will make fine camping-ground, an' with its fishings and shootings will give me an' my folk all we need, till I'm tired o' them, when others can have them; I mean others of *our* kind. As for the money . . . well, I will be seeing to that in my own way, Mr. What's-your-name. . . . Finlay, are you for saying? . . . Well, then, good-day to you, Mr. Finlay, an' ye can let me know when my uncle's dead.'

I suppose it was about a year after this that I found one day at a friend's house a little book of poems bearing my own surname, with Mànus before it as that of the author. The imprint showed that the book had been issued by a publisher in Edinburgh some twenty years back. It was the one achievement of Mànus, for whom all his kin had once so high hopes, and much of it seems to have been written when he was at the Scots College in Rome. I copied two of the poems. One was

called 'Cantilena Mundi,' the other 'The Star of Beauty.' I quote the one I can remember:—

It dwells not in the skies,
 My Star of Beauty!
 'Twas made of her sighs,
 Her tears and agonies,
 The fire in her eyes,
 My Star of Beauty!

Lovely and delicate,
 My Star of Beauty!
 How could she master Fate,
 Although she gave back hate
 Great as my love was great,
 My Star of Beauty!

I loved, she hated, well,
 My Star of Beauty!
 Soon, soon the passing bell:
 She rose, and I fell:
 Soft shines in deeps of hell
 My Star of Beauty!

I recalled this poem when, in Colonsay, I met Mànus Macleod, and remembered his story.

He was old and ragged. He had deserted, or been deserted by, his tinker herd; and wandered now, grey and dishevelled, from hamlet to hamlet, from parish to parish, from isle to isle. It was late October, and a premature cold had set in. The wind had shifted some of the snow on the mountains of Skye and Mull, and some had fallen among the old black ruins on Oronsay and along the Colonsay dunes of sand and salt bent. Mànus was in the inn kitchen, staring into the fire, and singing an old Gaelic song, below his breath.

When my name was spoken, he looked up quickly.

An instinct made me say this—

‘I can give you song for song, Mànus mac Tormod.’

‘How do you know that my father’s name was Norman?’ he asked in English.

‘How do I know that as Tormod mhic Leoid’s son, son of Tormod of Arrasay, you are heir to his brother Hydallan?’

Mànus frowned. Then he leaned over the fire, warming his thin, gaunt hands. I could see the flame-flush in them.

‘What song can you give me for my song—which, for sure, is not mine at all, at all, but the old sorrowful song by Donull MacDonull of Uist, “The Broken Heart”?’

‘It is called “The Star of Beauty,” I said, and quoted the first verse.

He rose and stooped over the fire. Abruptly he turned, and in swift silence walked from the room. His face was clay-white, and glistened with the streaming wet of tears.

The innkeeper’s wife looked after him. ‘A bad evil wastrel that,’ she said; ‘these tinkers are ill folk at the best, and Mànus Macleod is one o’ the worst o’ them. For sure, now, why should you be speaking to the man at all, at all? A dirty, ignorant man he is, with never a thought to him but his pipe an’ drink an’ other people’s goods.’

The following afternoon I heard that Mànus was

still in the loft, where he had been allowed to rest. He was at death's mouth, I was told.

I went to him. He smiled when he saw me. He seemed years and years younger, and not ill at all but for the leaf of flame on his white face and the wild shine in his great black eyes.

'Give me a wish,' he whispered.

'Peace,' I said.

He looked long at me.

'I have seen the Red Shepherd,' he said.

I knew what he meant, and did not answer.

'And the dark flock of birds,' he added. 'And last night, as I came here out of Oronsay, I saw a white hound running before me till I came here.'

There was silence for a time.

'And I have written this,' he muttered hoarsely. 'It is all I have written in all these years since she died whom I loved. You can put it in the little book you know of, if you have it.' He gave me an old leathern case. In it was a dirty folded sheet. He died that night. By the dancing yellow flame of the peats, while the wind screamed among the rocks, and the sea's gathering voices were more and more lamentable and dreadful, I read what he had given me. But in paraphrasing his simpler and finer Gaelic, I may also alter his title of 'Whisperings (or secret Whisperings) in the Darkness' to 'The Secrets of the Night,' because of the old Gaelic saying, 'The Red Shepherd, the White Hound, and the Dark Flock of Birds: the Three Secrets (or secret terrors) of the Night'—

In the great darkness where the shimmering stars

Are as the dazzle of the luminous wave

Moveth the shadow of the end of wars :

But nightly arises, as out of a bloody grave,

The Red Swineherd, he who has no name,

But who is gaunt, terrible, an awful flame

Fed upon blood and perishing lives and tears ;

His feet are heavy with the bewildering years

Trodden dim bygone ages, and his eyes

Are black and vast and void as midnight skies.

Beware of the White Hound whose baying no man hears,

Though it is the wind that shakes the unsteady stars :

It is the Hound seen of men in old forlorn wars :

It is the Hound that hunts the stricken years.

Pale souls in the ultimate shadows see it gleam

Like a long lance o' the moon, and as a moon-white
beam

It comes, and the soul is as blown dust within the wood

Wherein the White Hound moves where timeless shadows
brood.

Have heed, too, of the flock of birds from twilight places,

The desolate haunted ways of ancient wars—

Bewildered, terrible, winged, and shadowy faces

Of homeless souls adrift 'neath drifting stars.

But this thing surely I know, that he, the Red Flame,

And the White Hound, and the Dark Flock of Birds,

Appal me no more, who never never again

Through all the rise and set and set and rise of
pain

Shall hear the lips of her whom I loved uttering words,

Or hear my own lips in her shadowy hair naming her
name. ,

THE WHITE HERON

IT was in summer, when there is no night among these Northern Isles. The slow, hot days waned through a long after-glow of rose and violet; and when the stars came, it was only to reveal purple depths within depths.

Mary Macleod walked, barefoot, through the dewy grass, on the long western slope of Innisròn, looking idly at the phantom flake of the moon as it hung like a blown moth above the vast disclosure of the flower of sunset. Below it, beyond her, the ocean. It was pale, opalescent; here shimmering with the hues of the moonbow; here dusked with violet shadow, but, for the most part, pale, opalescent. No wind moved, but a breath arose from the momentary lips of the sea. The cool sigh floated inland, and made a continual faint tremor amid the salt grasses. The skuas and guillemots stirred, and at long intervals screamed.

The girl stopped, staring seaward. The illimitable, pale, unlifted wave; the hinted dusk of the quiet underwaters; the unfathomable violet gulfs overhead;—these silent comrades were not alien to her. Their kin, she was but a moving shadow on an isle; to her, they were the veils of wonder beyond which

the soul knows no death, but looks upon the face of Beauty, and upon the eyes of Love, and upon the heart of Peace.

Amid these silent spaces two dark objects caught the girl's gaze. Flying eastward, a solander trailed a dusky wing across the sky. So high its flight that the first glance saw it as though motionless; yet, even while Mary looked, the skyfarer waned suddenly, and that which had been was not. The other object had wings too, but was not a bird. A fishing-smack lay idly becalmed, her red-brown sail now a patch of warm dusk. Mary knew what boat it was—the *Nighean Donn*, out of Fionnaphort in Ithona, the westernmost of the Iarraidh Isles.

There was no one visible on board the *Nighean Donn*, but a boy's voice sang a monotonous Gaelic cadence, indescribably sweet as it came, remote and wild as an air out of a dim forgotten world, across the still waters. Mary Macleod knew the song, a strange *iorram* or boat-song made by Pòl the Freckled, and by him given to his friend Angus Macleod of Ithona. She muttered the words over and over, as the lilt of the boyish voice rose and fell—

It is not only when the sea is dark and chill and desolate
I hear the singing of the queen who lives beneath the
ocean.

Oft have I heard her chanting voice when noon o'erfloods
his golden gate,

Or when the moonshine fills the wave with snow-white
mazy motion.

And some day will it hap to me, when the black waves are
leaping,

Or when within the breathless green I see her shell-strewn
door,

That singing voice will lure me where my sea-drown'd love
lies sleeping

Beneath the slow white hands of her who rules the sunken
shore.

For in my heart I hear the bells that ring their fatal beauty,
The wild, remote, uncertain bells that chant their lonely
sorrow :

The lonely bells of sorrow, the bells of fatal beauty,

Oft in my heart I hear the bells, who soon shall know no
morrow.

The slow splashing of oars in the great hollow
cavern underneath her feet sent a flush to her face.
She knew who was there—that it was the little boat
of the *Nighean Donn*, and that Angus Macleod was
in it.

She stood among the seeding grasses, intent. The
cluster of white moon-daisies that reached to her
knees was not more pale than her white face; for
a white silence was upon Mary Macleod in her
dreaming girlhood, as in her later years.

She shivered once as she listened to Angus's
echoing song, while he secured his boat, and began
to climb from ledge to ledge. He too had heard
the lad Uille Ban singing as he lay upon a coil
of rope, while the smack lay idly on the unmov-
ing waters; and hearing, had himself taken up the
song—

*For in my heart I hear the bells that ring their fatal beauty,
The wild, remote, uncertain bells that chant their lonely
sorrow :*

*The lonely bells of sorrow, the bells of fatal beauty,
Oft in my heart I hear the bells, who soon shall know no
morrow.*

Mary shivered with the vague fear that had come upon her. Had she not dreamed, in the bygone night, that she heard some one in the sea singing that very song—some one with slow, white hands which waved idly above a dead man? A moment ago she had listened to the same song sung by the lad Uille Ban; and now, for the third time, she heard Angus idly chanting it as he rose invisibly from ledge to ledge of the great cavern below. Three idle songs; yet she remembered that death was but the broken refrain of an idle song.

When Angus leaped on to the slope and came towards her, she felt her pulse quicken. Tall and fair, he looked fairer and taller than she had ever seen him. The light that was still in the west lingered in his hair, which, yellow as it was, now glistened as with the sheen of bronze. He had left his cap in the boat; and as he crossed swiftly towards her, she realised anew that he deserved the Gaelic name given him by Pòl the poet—Angus the yellow-haired son of Youth. They had never spoken of their love, and now both realised in a flash that no words were needed. At midsummer noon no one says the sun shines.

Angus came forward with outreaching hands. 'Dear, dear love!' he whispered. 'Mhairi mo rùn, muirmean, mochree!'

She put her hands in his; she put her lips to his;

she put her head to his breast, and listened; all her life throbbing in response to the leaping pulse of the heart that loved her.

‘Dear, dear love!’ he whispered again.

‘Angus!’ she murmured.

They said no more, but moved slowly onward, hand in hand.

The night had their secret. For sure, it was in the low sighing of the deep when the tide put its whispering lips against the sleeping sea; it was in the spellbound silences of the isle; it was in the phantasmal light of the stars—the stars of dream, in a sky of dream, in a world of dream. When, an hour—or was it an eternity, or a minute?—later, they turned, she to her home near the clachan of Innisròn, he to his boat, a light air had come up on the forehead of the tide. The sail of the *Nighean Donn* flapped, a dusky wing in the darkness. The penetrating smell of sea-mist was in the air.

Mary had only one regret as she turned her face inland, when once the invisibly gathering mist hid from her even the blurred semblance of the smack—that she had not asked Angus to sing no more that song of Pòl the Freckled, which vaguely she feared, and even hated. She had stood listening to the splashing of the oars, and, later, to the voices of Angus and Uille Ban; and now, coming faintly and to her weirdly through the gloom, she heard her lover’s voice chanting the words again. What made him sing that song, in that hour, on this day of all days?

THE WHITE HERON

69

For in my heart I hear the bells that ring their fatal beauty,
The wild, remote, uncertain bells that chant their lonely
sorrow :

The lonely bells of sorrow, the bells of fatal beauty,
Oft in my heart I hear the bells, who soon shall know no
morrow.

But long before she was back at the peat-fire again she forgot that sad, haunting cadence, and remembered only his words—the dear words of him whom she loved, as he came towards her, across the dewy grass, with outstretched hands—

‘Dear, dear love!—mhairi mo rùn, muirnean, mochree!’

She saw them in the leaping shadows in the little room; in the red glow that flickered along the fringes of the peats; in the darkness which, like a sea, drowned the lonely croft. She heard them in the bubble of the meal, as slowly with wooden spurtle she stirred the porridge; she heard them in the rising wind that had come in with the tide; she heard them in the long resurge and multitudinous shingly inrush as the hands of the Atlantic tore at the beaches of Innisròn.

After the smooing of the peats, and when the two old people, the father of her father and his white-haired wife, were asleep, she sat for a long time in the warm darkness. From a cranny in the peat ash a smouldering flame looked out comfortingly. In the girl’s heart a great peace was come as well as a great joy. She had dwelled so long with silence that she knew its eloquent secrets;

and it was sweet to sit there in the dusk, and listen, and commune with silence, and dream.

Above the long, deliberate rush of the tidal waters round the piled beaches she could hear a dull, rhythmic beat. It was the screw of some great steamer, churning its way through the darkness; a stranger, surely, for she knew the times and seasons of every vessel that came near these lonely isles. Sometimes it happened that the Uist or Tiree steamers passed that way; doubtless it was the Tiree boat, or possibly the big steamer that once or twice in the summer fared northward to far-off St. Kilda.

She must have slept, and the sound have passed into her ears as an echo into a shell; for when, with a start, she arose, she still heard the thud-thud of the screw, although the boat had long since passed away.

It was the cry of a sea-bird which had startled her. Once—twice—the scream had whirled about the house. Mary listened, intent. Once more it came, and at the same moment she saw a drift of white press up against the window.

She sprang to her feet, startled.

'It is the cry of a heron,' she muttered, with dry lips; 'but who has heard tell of a white heron?—and the bird there is white as a snow-wreath.'

Some uncontrollable impulse made her hesitate. She moved to go to the window, to see if the bird were wounded, but she could not. Sobbing with inexplicable fear, she turned and fled, and a moment

later was in her own little room. There all her fear passed. Yet she could not sleep for long. If only she could get the sound of that beating screw out of her ears, she thought. But she could not, neither waking nor sleeping; nor the following day; nor any day thereafter; and when she died, doubtless she heard the thud-thud of a screw as it churned the dark waters in a night of shrouding mist.

For on the morrow she learned that the *Nighean Donn* had been run down in the mist, a mile south of Ithona, by an unknown steamer. The great vessel came out of the darkness, unheeding; unheeding she passed into the darkness again. Perhaps the officer in command thought that his vessel had run into some floating wreckage; for there was no cry heard, and no lights had been seen. Later, only one body was found—that of the boy Uille Ban.

When heartbreaking sorrow comes, there is no room for words. Mary Macleod said little; what, indeed, was there to say? The islanders gave what kindly comfort they could. The old minister, when next he came to Innisròn, spoke of the will of God and the Life Eternal.

Mary bowed her head. What had been, was not: could any words, could any solace, better that?

‘You are young, Mary,’ said Mr. Macdonald, when he had prayed with her. ‘God will not leave you desolate.’

She turned upon him her white face, with her great, brooding, dusky eyes:

‘Will He give me back Angus?’ she said, in her

low, still voice, that had the hush in it of lonely places.

He could not tell her so.

'It was to be,' she said, breaking the long silence that had fallen between them.

'Ay,' the minister answered.

She looked at him, and then took his hand. 'I am thanking you, Mr. Macdonald, for the good words you have put upon my sorrow. But I am not wishing that any more be said to me. I must go now, for I have to see to the milking, an' I hear the poor beasts lowing on the hillside. The old folk too are weary, and I must be getting them their porridge.'

After that no one ever heard Mary Macleod speak of Angus. She was a good lass, all agreed, and made no moan; and there was no croft tidier than Scaur-a-van, and because of her it was; and she made butter better than any on Innisròn; and in the isles there was no cheese like the Scaur-a-van cheese.

Had there been any kith or kin of Angus, she would have made them hers. She took the consumptive mother of Uille Ban from Ithona, and kept her safe-havened at Scaur-a-van, till the woman sat up one night in her bed, and cried in a loud voice that Uille Ban was standing by her side and playing a wild air on the strings of her heart, which he had in his hands, and the strings were breaking, she cried. They broke, and Mary envied her, and the whispering joy she would be having with Uille Ban. But Angus had no near kin. Perhaps, she thought,

he would miss her the more where he had gone. He had a friend, whom she had never seen. He was a man of Iona, and was named Eachain MacEachain Maclean. He and Angus had been boys in the same boat, and sailed thrice to Iceland together, and once to Peterhead, that maybe was as far or further, or perhaps upon the coast-lands further east. Mary knew little geography, though she could steer by the stars. To this friend she wrote, through the minister, to say that if ever he was in trouble he was to come to her.

It was on the third night after the sinking of the *Nighean Donn* that Mary walked alone, beyond the shingle beaches, and where the ledges of trap run darkly into deep water. It was a still night and clear. The lambs and ewes were restless in the moonshine; their bleating filled the upper solitudes. A shoal of mackerel made a sputtering splashing sound beyond the skerries outside the haven. The ebb, sucking at the weedy extremes of the ledges, caused a continuous bubbling sound. There was no stir of air, only a breath upon the sea; but, immeasurably remote, frayed clouds, like trailed nets in yellow gulfs of moonlight, shot flame-shaped tongues into the dark, and seemed to lick the stars as these shook in the wind. 'No mist to-night,' Mary muttered; then, startled by her own words, repeated, and again repeated, 'There will be no mist to-night.'

Then she stood as though become stone. Before her, on a solitary rock, a great bird sat. It was a

heron. In the moonshine its plumage glistened white as foam of the sea ; white as one of her lambs it was.

She had never seen, never heard of, a white heron. There was some old Gaelic song—what was it?—no, she could not remember—something about the souls of the dead. The words would not come.

Slowly she advanced. The heron did not stir. Suddenly she fell upon her knees, and reached out her arms, and her hair fell about her shoulders, and her heart beat against her throat, and the grave gave up its sorrow, and she cried—

‘Oh, Angus, Angus, my beloved ! Angus, Angus, my dear, dear love !’

She heard nothing, saw nothing, felt nothing, knew nothing, till, numbed and weak, she stirred with a cry, for some creeping thing of the sea had crossed her hand. She rose and stared about her. There was nothing to give her fear. The moon rays danced on a glimmering sea-pasture far out upon the water ; their lances and javelins flashed and glinted merrily. A dog barked as she crossed the flag-stones at Scaur-a-van, then suddenly began a strange furtive baying. She called, ‘Luath ! Luath !’

The dog was silent a moment, then threw its head back and howled, abruptly breaking again into a sustained baying. The echo swept from croft to croft, and wakened every dog upon the isle.

Mary looked back. Slowly circling behind her she saw the white heron. With a cry, she fled into the house.

For three nights thereafter she saw the white heron. On the third she had no fear. She followed the foam-white bird; and when she could not see it, then she followed its wild, plaintive cry. At dawn she was still at Ardfeulan, on the western side of Innisròn; but her arms were round the drowned heart whose pulse she had heard leap so swift in joy, and her lips put a vain warmth against the dear face that was wan as spent foam, and as chill as that.

Three years after that day Mary saw again the white heron. She was alone now, and she was glad, for she thought Angus had come, and she was ready.

Yet neither death nor sorrow happened. Thrice, night after night, she saw the white gleam of nocturnal wings, heard the strange bewildering cry.

It was on the fourth day, when a fierce gale covered the isle with a mist of driving spray. No Innisròn boat was outside the haven; for that, all were glad. But in the late afternoon a cry went from mouth to mouth.

There was a fishing-coble on the skerries! That meant death for all on board, for nothing could be done. The moment came soon. A vast drowning billow leaped forward, and when the cloud of spray had scattered, there was no coble to be seen. Only one man was washed ashore, nigh dead, upon the spar he clung to. His name was Eachain MacEachain, son of a Maclean of Iona.

And that was how Mary Macleod met the friend of Angus, and he a ruined man, and how she put her life to his, and they were made one.

Her man . . . yes, he was her man, to whom she was loyal and true, and whom she loved right well for many years. But she knew, and he too knew well, that she had wedded one man in her heart, and that no other could take his place there, then or for ever. She had one husband only, but it was not he to whom she was wed, but Angus, the son of Alasdair —him whom she loved with the deep love that surpasseth all wisdom of the world that ever was, or is, or shall be.

And Eachain her man lived out his years with her, and was content, though he knew that in her silent heart his wife, who loved him well, had only one lover, one dream, one hope, one passion, one remembrance, one husband.

CHILDREN OF THE DARK STAR¹

It is God that builds the nest of the blind bird. I know not when or where I heard that said, if ever I heard it, but it has been near me as a breast-feather to a bird's heart since I was a child.

When I ponder it, I say to myself that it is God also who guides sunrise and moonrise into obscure hearts, to build, with those winged spirits of light, a nest for the blind soul.

Often and often I have thought of this saying of late, because of him who was known to me years ago as Alasdair Achanna, and of whom I have written elsewhere as 'The Anointed Man': though now from the Torridons of Ross to the Rhinns of Islay he is known by one name only, 'Alan Dall.'

No one knows the end of those who are born under

¹ This story, and the two which follow, 'Alasdair the Proud' and 'The Amadan,' belong to the series of the Achannas of which three have already appeared: 'The Anointed Man' (*The Sin-Eater* and in *Spiritual Tales*) and 'The Dàn-nan-Ròn' and 'Green Branches' (*The Sin-Eater* and in *Tragic Romances*).

As to my use of the forename 'Gloom' for the chief personage in these Achanna stories, I should explain that the designation is, of course, not a genuine name in English. At the same time, I have actual warrant for its use; for I knew a Uist man, who, in the bitterness of his sorrow, after his wife's death in childbirth, named his son *Mùlad* (i.e. the Gloom of Sorrow: grief).

the Dark Star. It is said they are born to some strange, and certainly obscure, destiny. Some are fey from their youth, or a melancholy of madness comes upon them later, so that they go forth from their kind, and wander outcast, haunting most the lonely and desolate regions where the voice of the hill-wind is the sole voice. Some, born to evil, become, in strange ways, ministers of light. Some, born of beauty, are plumed spirits of decay. But of one and all this is sure : that, in the end, none knows the when or how of their going.

Of these Children of the Dark Star my friend Alasdair Achanna, 'Alan Dall,' was one.

'Alan Dall'—blind, as the Gaelic word means : it was difficult for me to believe that darkness could be fallen, without break, upon the eyes of Alasdair Achanna. He had so loved the beauty of the world that he had forfeited all else. Yet, blind wayfarer along the levens of life as he was, I envied him—for, truly, this beautiful soul had entered into the kingdom of dreams

When accidentally I met him once again, it was with deep surprise on both sides. He thought I had gone to a foreign land, either the English southlands or 'away beyond.' I, for my part, had believed him to be no longer of the living, and had more than once wondered if he had been lured away, as the saying is.

We spoke much of desolate Eilanmore, and wondered if the rains and winds still made the same gloom upon the isle as when we sojourned there.

We spoke of his kinswoman, and my dear friend, Anne Gillespie, she who went away with Manùs MacCodrum, and died so young; and of Manùs himself and his terrible end, when Gloom his brother played death upon him, in the deep sea, where the seals were, and he hearing nothing, nothing in all the world, but the terror and horror of the Dàn-nan-Ròn. And we spoke of Gloom himself, of whom none had heard since the day he fled from the west—not after the death of Manùs, about which few knew, but after the murder of the swimmer in the loch, whom he took to be his own brother Sheumais and the lover of his desire, Katreen Macarthur. I thought—perhaps it was rather I preferred to think—that Gloom was no longer among the evil forces loose in the world; but I heard from Alasdair that he was alive, and would some day come again; for the men who are without compassion, and sin because it is their life, cannot for too long remain from the place where blooms the scarlet flower of their evil-doing.

Since then I have had reason to know how true was Alasdair's spiritual knowledge—though this is not the time for me to relate either what I then heard from 'Alan Dall,' or what terrible and strange revealing of Gloom Achanna there was some three years ago, when his brother, whom he was of old so wont to mock, was no longer among those who dwell visibly on earth.

But naturally that which the more held me in interest was the telling by Alasdair of how he whom

I had thought dead was alive, and known by another name than his own. It is a story I will tell again, that of 'Alan Dall': of how his blindness came to him, and of how he quickened with the vision that is from within, and of divers strange things; but here I speak only of that which brought him to Love and Death and the Gate of Dreams. ●

For many weeks and months after he left Eilamore, he told me, he wandered aimlessly abroad among the Western Isles. The melancholy of his youth had become a madness, but this was only the air that blew continually upon the loneliness of his spirit. There was a star upon his forehead, I know, for I have seen it: I saw it long ago when he revealed to me that beauty was a haunting spirit everywhere: when I looked upon him, and knew him as one anointed. In the light of that star he walked ever in a divine surety. It was the star of beauty.

He fared to and fro as one in a dream, a dream behind, a dream his quest, himself a dream. Wherever he went, the light that was his spirit shone for healing, for peace, for troubled joy. He had ever lived so solitary, so few save his own kin and a scattered folk among the inner isles knew him even by sight, that in all the long reach of the Hebrides from the Butt of Lewis to Barra Head he passed as a stranger—a Gael and an islesman, it is true, because of his tongue and accent, but still a stranger. So great was the likeness he bore to one who was known throughout the Hebrides, and in particular

to every man and woman in the South Isles, so striking in everything save height was he to the priest, Father Alan M'lan, known everywhere simply as Father Alan, that he in turn came to be called Alan Mòr.

He was in Benbecula, the isle of a thousand waters, when he met his brother Gloom, and this on the day or the next day but one following the wild end of Manùs MacCodrum. His brother, dark, slim, shadowy-eyed, and furtive as an otter, was moving swiftly through a place of heather-clumps and brown tangled fern. Alasdair was on the ground, and saw him as he came. There was a smile on his face that he knew was evil, for Gloom so smiled when his spirit rose within him.

He stopped abruptly, a brief way off. He had not descried any other, but a yellowhammer had swung sidelong from a spire of furze, uttering a single note. Somewhere, he thought, death was on the trail of life.

There was motionless stillness for a brief while. The yellowhammer hopped to the topmost spray of the bramblebush where he had alit, and his light song flirted through the air.

Then Gloom spoke. He looked sidelong, smiling furtively; yet his eyes had not rested on his brother.

'Well, now, Alasdair, soon there will not be an Achanna on Eilanmore.'

Alasdair—tall, gaunt, with his blue dreaming eyes underneath his gizzled tangled hair—rose, and put

out his right hand in greeting; but Gloom looked beyond it. Alasdair broke the silence which ensued.

'So you are here in Benbecula, brother? I, and others too, thought you had gone across the seas when you left Eilanmore.'

'The nest was fouled, I am thinking, brother, or you, and Manùs too, and then I myself, would not be here and be there.'

'Are you come out of the south, or going there?'

'Well, and for why that?'

'I thought you might be having news for me of Manùs. You know that Anne, who was dear to us, is under the grass now?'

'Ay, she is dead. I know that'

'And Manùs? Is he still at Balnahunnur-sa-mona? Is he the man he was?'

'No, I am not for thinking, brother, that Manùs is the man he was.'

'He will be at the fishing now? I heard that more than a mile o' the sea foamed yesterday off Craiginish Heads, with the big school of mackerel there was.'

'Ay, he was ever fond o' the sea, Manùs Mac-Codrum: fey o' the sea, for the matter o' that, Alasdair Achanna.'

'I am on my way now to see Manùs.'

'I would not be going, brother,' answered Gloom, in a slow, indifferent voice.

'And for why that?'

Gloom advanced idly, and slid to the ground, lying there and looking up into the sky.

'It's a fair, sweet world, Alasdair.'

Alasdair looked at him, but said nothing.

'It's a fair, sweet world. I have heard that saying on your mouth a score of times, and a score upon a score.'

'Well?'

'Well? But is it not a fair, sweet world?'

'Ay, it is fair and sweet.'

'Lie still, brother, and I will tell you about Manùs, who married Anne whom I loved. And I will be beginning, if you please, with the night when she told us that he was to be her man, and when I played on my feadan the air of the Dàn-nan-Ròn. Will you be remembering that?'

'I remember'

Then, with that, Gloom, always lying idly on his back, and smiling often as he stared into the blue sky, told all that happened to Anne and Manùs, till death came to Anne, and then how Manùs heard the seal-voice that was in his blood calling to him; and how he went to his sea-folk, made mad by the secret fatal song of the feadan, the song that is called the Dàn-nan-Ròn, and how the pools in the rocky skerries out yonder in the sea were red still with the blood that the seals had not lapped, or that the tide had not yet lifted and spilled greying into the grey wave.

There was a silence when he had told that thing. Alasdair did not look at him. Gloom, still lying on his back, stared into the sky, smiling furtively. Alasdair was white as foam at night. At last he spoke.

‘The death of Manùs is knocking at your heart, Gloom Achanna.’

‘I am not a seal, brother. Ask the seals. They know. He was of their people: not of us.’

‘It is a lie. He was a man, as we are. He was our friend, and the husband of Apne. His death is knocking at your heart, Gloom Achanna.’

‘Are you for knowing if our brother Sheumais is still on Eilanmore?’

Alasdair looked long at him, anxious, puzzled by the abrupt change.

‘And for why should he not still be on Eilanmore?’

‘Have you not had hearing of anything about Sheumais—and—and—about Katreena nic Airt——’

‘About Katreen, daughter of Ait Macarthur, in the Sleat of Skye?’

‘Ay—about Sheumais, and Katreen Macarthur?’

‘What about them?’

‘Nothing. Ah no, for sure, nothing. But did you never hear Sheumais speak of this bonnie Katreen?’

‘He has the deep love for her, Gloom; the deep, true love.’

‘H’m!’

With that Gloom smiled again, as he stared idly into the sky from where he lay on his back amid the heather and bracken. With a swift, furtive gesture he slipped his feadan from his breast, and put his breath upon it. A cool, high spiral of sound, like delicate blue smoke, ascended.

Then, suddenly, he began to play the *Dannhsa na-Mairbh*—the Dance of Death.

Alasdair shivered, but said nothing. He had his eyes on the ground. When the wild, fantastic, terrifying air filled the very spires of the heather with its dark music—its music out of the grave—he looked at his brother.

‘Will you be telling me now, Gloom, what is in your heart against Sheumais?’

‘Is not Sheumais wishful to be leaving Eilanmore?’

‘Like enough. I know nothing of Eilanmore now. It is long since I have seen the white o’ the waves in Catacol haven.’

‘I am thinking that that air I was playing will help him to be leaving soon, but not to be going where Katreen Macarthur is.’

‘And why not?’

‘Well, because I am thinking Katreen, the daughter of Art Macarthur, is to have another man to master her than our brother Sheumais. I will tell you his name, Alasdair: it is Gloom Achanna.’

‘It is a cruel wrong that is in your mind. You would do to Sheumais what you have done to Manùs, husband of Anne, our friend and kinswoman. There is death in your heart, Gloom: the blue mould is on the corn that is your heart.’

Gloom played softly. It was a little eddy of evil bitter music, swift and biting and poisonous as an adder’s tongue.

Alasdair’s lips tightened, and a red splash came

into the whiteness of his face, as though a snared bird were bleeding beneath a patch of snow.

'You have no love for the girl. By your own word to me on Eilanmore, you had the hunger on you for Anne Gillespie. Was that just because you saw that she loved Manùs? And is it so now—that you have a hawk's eye for the poor birdeen yonder in the Sleat, and that just because you know, or have heard, that Sheumais loves her, and loves her true, and because she loves him?'

'I have heard no such lie, Alasdair Achanna.'

'Then what is it that you have heard?'

'Oh, the east wind whispers in the grass; an' a bird swims up from the grass an' sings it in the blue fields up yonder; an' then it falls down again in a thin, thin rain; an' a drop trickles into my ear. An' that is how I am knowing what I know, Alasdair Achanna.'

'And Anne—did you love Anne?'

'Anne is dead.'

'It's the herring-love that is yours, Gloom. To-day it is a shadow here. to-morrow it is a shadow yonder. There is no tide for you: there is no haven for the likes o' you.'

'There is one woman I want. It is Katreen Mac-arthur.'

'If it be a true thing that I have heard, Gloom Achanna, you have brought shame and sorrow to one woman already.'

For the first time Gloom stirred. He shot a swift, shadowy glance at Alasdair, and a tremor was in his

white, sensitive hands. He looked as a startled fox does, when, intent, its muscles quiver before flight.

'And what will you have heard?' he asked in a low voice.

'That you took away from her home a girl who did not love you, but on whom you put a spell; and that she followed you to her sorrow, and was held by you to her shame; and that she was lost, or drowned herself at last, because of these things.'

'And did you hear who she was?'

'No. The man who told me was Aulay MacAulay, of Carndhu in Sutherland. He said he did not know who she was, but I am thinking he did know, poor man, because his eyes wavered, and he put a fluttering hand to his beard and began to say swift, stammering words about the herrin' that had been seen off the headland that morning.'

Gloom smiled, a faint fugitive smile; then, half turning where he lay, he took a letter from his pocket.

'Ay, for sure, Aulay MacAulay was an old friend of yours; to be sure, yes. I am remembering he used sometimes to come to Eilanmore in his smack. But before I speak again of what you said to me just now, I will read you my letter that I have written to our brother Sheumais; he is not knowing if I am living still, or am dead.'

With that he opened the letter, and, smiling momentarily at times, he read it in a slow, deliberate

voice, and as though it were the letter of another man :—

Well, Sheumais, my brother, it is wondering if I am dead you will be. Maybe ay, and maybe no. But I send you this writing to let you see that I know all you do and think of. So you are going to leave Eilanmore without an Achanna upon it? And you will be going to Sleat in Skye? Well, let me be telling you this thing: Do not go. I see blood there. And there is this, too: neither you nor any man shall take Katreen away from me. You know that; and Ian Macarthur knows it; and Katreen knows it: and that holds whether I am alive or dead. I say to you: Do not go. It will be better for you and for all. Ian Macarthur is away on the north-sea with the whaler-captain who came to us at Eilanmore, and will not be back for three months yet. It will be better for him not to come back. But if he comes back he will have to reckon with the man who says that Katreen Macarthur is his. I would rather not have two men to speak to, and one my brother. It does not matter to you where I am. I want no money just now. But put aside my portion for me. Have it ready for me against the day I call for it. I will not be patient that day: so have it ready for me. In the place that I am, I am content. You will be saying: Why is my brother away in a remote place (I will say this to you: That it is not further north than St. Kilda nor further south than the Mull of Cantyre!), and for what reason? That is between me and silence. But perhaps you think of Anne some-

times. Do you know that she lies under the green grass? And of Manùs MacCodrum? They say that he swam out into the sea and was drowned; and they whisper of the seal-blood, though the minister is angered with them for that. He calls it a madness. Well, I was there at that madness, and I played to it on my feadan. And now, Sheumais, can you be thinking of what the tune was that I played?

Your brother, who waits his own day,

GLOOM.

Do not be forgetting this thing: I would rather not be playing the Dannhsa-na-Mairbh. It was an ill hour for Manùs when he heard the Dàn-nan-Ròn; it was the song of his soul, that; and yours is the Dannhsa-na-Mairbh.

When he had read the last words, Gloom looked at Alasdair. His eyes quailed instinctively at the steadfast gaze of his brother.

'I am thinking,' he said lightly, though uneasily as he himself knew, 'that Sheumais will not now be putting his marriage-thoughts upon Katreen.'

For a minute or more Alasdair was silent. Then he spoke.

'Do you remember, when you were a child, what old Morag said?'

'No.'

'She said that your soul was born black, and that you were no child for all your young years; and that for all your pleasant ways, for all your smooth

way and smother tongue, you would do cruel evil to man and woman as long as you lived. She said you were born under the Dark Star.'

Gloom laughed.

'Ay, and you too, Alasdair. Don't be forgetting that. You too, she saw, were born so. She said we—you and I—that we two were the Children of the Dark Star.'

'But she said no evil of me, Gloom, and you are knowing that well.'

'Well, and what then?'

'Do not send that letter to Sheumais. He has deep love for Katreen. Let the lass be. You do not love her, Gloom. It will be to her sorrow and shame if you seek her. But if you are still for sending it, I will sail to-morrow for Eilanmore. I will tell Sheumais, and I will go with him to the Sleat of Skye. And I will be there to guard the girl Katreen against you, Gloom.'

'No: you will do none of those things. And for why? Because to-morrow you will be hurrying far north to Stornoway. And when you are at Stornoway you may still be Alan Mòr to every one, as you are here, but to one person you will be Alasdair Achanna, and no other, and now and for evermore.'

Alasdair stared, amazed.

'What wild-goose folly is this that you would be setting me on, you whom it is my sorrow to call brother?'

'I have a letter here for you to read. I wrote it many days ago, but it is a good letter now for all

that. If I give it to you now, will you pass me the word that you will not read it till I am gone away from here—till you cannot have a sight of me, or of the shadow of my shadow?’

‘I promise.’

‘Then here it is, an’ good day to you, Alasdair Achanna. An’ if ever we meet again, you be keeping to your way, as I will keep to my way: and in that doing there shall be no blood between brothers. But if you want to seek me, you will find me across the seas, and mayhap Katreen—ah, well, yes, Katreen or some one else—by my side.’

And with that, and giving no hand, or no glance of the eyes, Gloom rose, and turned upon his heel, and walked slowly but lightly across the tangled bent.

Alasdair watched him till he was a long way off. Gloom never once looked back. When he was gone a hundred yards or more, he put his feadan to his mouth and began to play. Two airs he played, the one ever running into the other: wild, fantastic, and, in Alasdair’s ears, horrible to listen to. In the one he heard the moaning of Anne, the screams of Manùs among the seals: in the other, a terror moving stealthily against his brother Sheumais, and against Katreen, and—and—he knew not whom.

When the last faint wild spiral of sound, that seemed to be neither of the Dàn-nan-Ròn nor of the Dannhsa-na-Mairbh, but of the soul of evil that inhabited both,—when this last perishing echo was no more, and only the clean cold hill-wind came down

across the moors with a sighing sweetness, Alasdair rose. The letter could wait now, he muttered, till he was before the peats.

When he returned to the place where he was lodging, the crofter's wife put a bowl of porridge and some coarse rye-bread before him.

'And when you've eaten, Alan Mòr,' she said, as she put her plaid over her head and shoulders, and stood in the doorway, 'will you be having the goodness to smoor the peats before you lie down for the sleep that I'm thinking is heavy upon you?'

'Ay, for sure,' Alasdair answered gently. 'But are you not to be here to-night?'

'No. The sister of my man Ranald is down with the fever, and her man away with mine at the fishing, and I am going to be with her this night; but I will be here before you wake for all that. And so good-night again, Alan Mòr.'

'God's blessing, and a quiet night, good woman.'

Then, after he had supped, and dreamed a while as he sat opposite the fire of glowing peats, he opened the letter that Gloom had given him. He read it slowly.

It was some minutes later that he took it up again, from where it had fallen on the red sandstone of the hearth. And now he read it once more, aloud, and in a low, strained voice that had a bitter, frozen grief in it—a frozen grief that knew no thaw in tears, in a single sob.

You will remember well, Alasdair my brother, that you loved Marsail nic Ailpean, who lived in Eilan-

Rona. You will be remembering, too, that when Ailpean MacAilpean said he would never let Marsail put her hand in yours, you went away and said no more. That was because you were a fool, Alasdair my brother. And Marsail—she, too, thought you were a fool. I know you did that doing because you thought it was Marsail's wish: that is, because she did not love you. What had that to do with it? I am asking you, what had that to do with it, if you wanted Marsail? Women are for men, not men for women. And, brother, because you are a poet, let me tell you this, which is old ancient wisdom, and not mine alone, that no woman likely to be loved by a poet can be true to a poet. For women are all at heart cowards, and it takes a finer woman than any you or I have known to love a poet. For that means to take the steep brae instead of the easy lily leven. I am thinking, Alasdair, you will not find easily the woman that in her heart of hearts will leave the lily leven for the steep brae. No, not easily.

Ah yes, for sure, I am hearing you say—women bear pain better, are braver, too, than men. I have heard you say that. I have heard the whistle-fish at the coming of the tide—but a little later the tide came nearer. And are they brave, these women you who are poets speak of, but whom we who are men never meet! I will tell you this little thing, brother: they are always crying for love, but love is the one thing they fear. And in their hearts they hate poets, Alasdair, because poets say, Be true: but that cannot be, because women can be true to their lovers, but they cannot be

true to love—for love wishes sunrise and full moon everywhere, so that there be no lie anywhere, and that is why women fear love.

And I am thinking of these things, because of Marsail whom you loved, and because of the song you made once about the bravery of woman. I have forgotten the song, but I remember that the last line of that song was 'foam o' the sea.'

And what is all this about? you will be saying when you read this. Well, for that, it is my way. If you want a woman—not that a man like you, all visions and bloodless as a skate, could ever have that want—you would go to her and say so. But my way is to play my feadan at the towers of that woman's pride and self-will, and see them crumbling, crumbling, till I walk in when I will, and play my feadan again, and go laughing out once more, and she with me.

But again you will say, Why all this? Brother, will you be remembering this: That our brother Marcus also loved Marsail. Marcus is under the wave, you will say. Yes, Marcus is under the wave. But I, Gloom Achanna, am not and I too loved Marsail. Well, when you went away, you wrote a letter to her to say that you would never love any other woman. She did not get that letter. It is under the old black stone with the carvings on it, that is in the brown water of the bog that lies between Eilanmore farmhouse and the Grey Loch. And once, long afterward, you wrote again, and you sent that letter to Marcus, to take to her and to give to her in person. I found it on the day of his death in the pocket of a

frieze coat he had worn the day before. I do not know where it is now. The gulls know. Or perhaps the crabs at the bottom of the sea do. You with your writing, brother: I with my feadan.

Well, I went to Eilan-Rona. I played my feadan there, outside the white walls of Marsail nic Ailpean. And when the walls were crumbling I entered, and I said Come, and she came.

No, no, Alasdair my brother, I do not think you would have been happy. She was ever letting tears come in the twilight, and in the darkness of the sleeping hours. I have heard her sob in full noon, brother. She was fair to see, a comely lass; but she never took to a vagrant life. She thought we were going to Coleraine to sail to America. America is a long way—it is a longer way than love for a woman who has too many tears. She said I had put a spell upon her. Tut, tut. I played my feadan to pretty Marsail. No harm in that, for sure, Alasdair aghrày?

For six months or more we wandered here and there. She had no English—so, to quiet her with silence, I went round by the cold bleak burghs and grey stony towns northward and eastward of Inverness, as far and further than Peterhead and Fraserburgh. A cold land, a thin, bloodless folk. I would not be recommending it to you, Alasdair. And yet, for why not? It would be a good place for the 'Anointed Man.' You could be practising there nicely, brother, against cold winds and cold hearths and bitter cold ways.

This is a long, long letter, the longest I have ever written. It has been for pleasure to me to write this

letter, though I have written slowly, and now here, and now there. And I must be ending. But I will say this first: That I am weary of Marsail now, and that, too, for weeks past. She will be having a child soon. She is in Stornoway, at the house of Bean Marsanta MacIlleathain ('Widow M'Lean' as they have it in that half-English place), in the street that runs behind the big street where the Courthouse is. She will be there till her time is over. It is a poor place, ill-smelling too. But she will do well there: Bean Catreena is a good woman, if she is paid for it. And I paid good money, Alasdair. It will do for a time. Not for very long, I am thinking, but till then. Marsail has no longer her fair-to-see way with her. It is a pity that—for Marsail.

And now, brother, will you be remembering your last word to me on Eilanmore? You said, 'You shall yet eat dust, Gloom Achanna, whose way is the way of death.' And will you be remembering what I said? I said, 'Wait, for I may come later than you to that bitter eating.'

And now I am thinking that it is you, and not I, who have eaten dust.—Your brother,

GLOOM.

And so—his dream was over. The vision of a happiness to be, of a possible happiness—and, for long, it had not been with Alasdair a vision of reward to him, but one of a rarer happiness, which considered only the weal of Marsail, and that whether ultimately he or some other won her—this, which

was, now was not: this was become as the dew on last year's grass. Not once had he wavered in his dream. By day and by night the wild-rose of his love had given him beauty and fragrance. He had come to hope little: indeed, to believe that Marsail might already happily be wed, and perhaps with a child's little hands against her breast. I am thinking he did not love as most men love.

When the truth flamed into his heart from the burning ashes of Gloom's letter, he sat a while, staring vaguely into the glow of the peats. There had been a bitter foolishness in his making, he muttered to himself: a bitter foolishness. Had he been more as other men and less a dreamer, had he shown less desire of the soul and more desire of the body, then surely Marsail would not have been so hard to win. For she had lingered with him in the valley, if she had not trod the higher slopes: that he remembered with mingled joy and grief. Surely she had loved him. And, of a truth, his wrought imaginings were not rainbow-birds. Their wings had caught the spray of those bitter waters which we call experience, the wisdom of the flesh. Great love claims the eternal stars behind the perishing stars of the beloved's eyes, and would tread 'the vast of dreams' beneath a little human heart. But there are few who love thus. It was not likely that Marsail was of those strong enough to mate with the great love. The many love too well the near securities.

All night long Alasdair sat brooding by the fire. Before dawn, he rose and went to the door. The

hollow infinitude of the sky was filled with the incense of a myriad smoke of stars. His gaze wandered, till held where Hesperus and the planets called The Hounds leaped, tremulously incessant, for ever welling to the brim, yet never spilling their radiant liquid fires. An appalling stillness prevailed in these depths.

Beyond the heather-slope in the moor he could hear the sea grinding the shingle as the long, slow wave rose and fell. Once, for a few moments, he listened intent: invisibly overhead a tail of wild geese travelled wedgewise towards polar seas, and their wild forlorn honk slipped bell-like through the darkness, and as from ledge to ledge of silent air.

As though it were the dew of that silence, peace descended upon him. There was, in truth, a love deeper than that of the body. Marsail—ah, poor broken heart, poor wounded life! Was love not great enough to heal that wound; was there not balm to put a whiteness and a quietness over that troubled heart, deep calm and moonrise over drowning waters?

Mayhap she did not love him now, could never love him as he loved her, with the love that is blind to life and deaf to death: well, her he loved. It was enough. Her sorrow and her shame, at least, might be his too. Her will would be his will: and if she were too weary to will, her weariness would be his to guide into a haven of rest: and if she had no thought of rest, no dream of rest, no wish for rest, but only a blind, baffled crying for the love, which

had brought her to the dust, well, that too he would take as his own, and comfort her with a sweet, impossible dream, and crown her shame with honour, and put his love like cool green grass beneath her feet.

‘And she will not lose all,’ he said, smiling gently : adding, below his breath, as he turned to make ready for his departure against the dawn, ‘because, for sure, it is God that builds the nest of the blind bird.’

ALASDAIR THE PROUD¹

'THERE were crowns lying there, idle gold in the yellow sand, and no man heeded them. Why should any man heed them? And where the long grass waved, there were women's breasts, so still in the brown silence, that the flitting moths, which shake with the breaths of daisies, motionlessly poised their wings above where so many sighs once were, and where no more was any pulse of joy.'

'And what was the name of the man who led the spears on that day?'

'He had the name that you have—Alasdair; Alasdair the Proud.'

'What was the cause of that red trail and of the battle among the hills?'

Gloom Achanna smiled, that swift, furtive smile which won so many, and in the end men and women cursed.

'It was a dream,' he said slowly.

'A dream?'

'Yes. Her name was Enya—Enya of the Dark Eyes.'

Alasdair M'lan's grey-blue eyes wandered listlessly from the man who lay beside him in the heather.

¹The opening sentence is from the tale in the third section, 'Enya of the Dark Eyes.'

Enya of the Dark Eyes! The name was like a moonbeam in his mind.

Gloom Achanna watched him, though he kept his gaze upon the dry, crackled sprays of the heather, and was himself, seemingly, idly adrift in the swimming thought that is as the uncertain wind.

How tall and strong his companion was! he meditated. Had he forgotten, Gloom wondered: had he forgotten that day, years and years ago, when he had thrust him, Gloom Achanna, aside, and had then with laughing scorn lifted him suddenly and thrown him into the Pool of Dermid? That was in Skye, in the Sleat of Skye. It was many years ago. That did not matter, though. There are no years to remembrance; what was, either is or is not.

And now they had met again by the roadside; and if not in Skye, not far from it, for they were now in Tiree, the low surf-girt island that for miles upon miles swims like a green snake between the Southern Minch and the Hebrid seas. It was a chance meeting too, if there is any chance; and after so many years. Gloom Achanna smiled; a sudden swift shadow it was that crossed his face, smooth, comely, pale beneath his sleek, seal-like dark hair. No, it was not chance this, he whispered to himself; no, for sure, it was not chance. When he looked suddenly at Alasdair M'Ian, with furtive, forgetting eyes, he did not smile again, but the dusky pupils expanded and contracted.

And so, his thought ran, Alasdair M'Ian was

great man in that little world over yonder, the world of the towns and big cities! He had made a name for himself by his books, his poems, and the strange music wherewith he clothed his words, whether in song or story.

H'm; for that, did not he, Gloom, know many a *dàn*, many a wild *òran*; could he not tell many a *sgeul* as fine, or finer? Ay, by the Black Stone of Iona! Why, then, should this Englishman have so much fame? Well, well, if not English, he wrote and spoke and thought in that foreign tongue, and had forgotten the old speech, or had no ease with it, and no doubt was Sasunnach to the core.

But for all his fame, and though he was still young and strong and fair to see, had he forgotten? He, Gloom Achanna, did not ever forget.

Indeed, indeed, there was no chance in that meeting. Why had he, Gloom, gone to Tìree at all? It had been a whim. But now he understood.

And Alasdair M'Ian—Alasdair the Proud? What was *he* there for? There were no idle, silly folk on the long isle of Tìree to listen to English songs. Ah yes, indeed; of course he was there. Where would he be coming to, after these long seven years, but to the place where he had first met and loved Ethlenn Maclaine?

Gloom pondered a while. That was a strange love, that of Alasdair M'Ian, for a woman who was wife to another man, and he loving her, and she him. She had been the flame behind all these poems and stories which had made him so famous. For seven

years he had loved her, and Alasdair the Proud was not the man to love a woman for seven years unless it was out of the great love, which is as deep as the sea, and as wild and hopeless as the south wind when she climbs against the stars.

Then all that he knew, all that he had heard of fact and half fact and cloudy rumour, all that he surmised, became in Gloom's mind a clear vision. He understood now, and he remembered. Had he not heard but a brief while ago that Alasdair was fëy with his love-dream? Did he not know that the man had endured so long, and become what he was, because for all these years he had held Ethlenn's love, because he believed that she loved him as he her? Was it not by this that he lived; that he made beauty with cunning, haunting words? Was it not true that for all her marriage with the good, loving, frail son of Maclaine of Inch, she was in body and mind and soul wife to the man whom, too late, she had met, and who in her had found the bitter infinite way?

Yes; now, in a myriad sudden eddies of remembrance and surmise, he knew the poor tired soul, with its great dreams and imperishable desires, of Alasdair the Proud; and like a hawk his spirit hovered over it, uttering fierce cries of a glad and terrible hate. And of one thing he thought with almost an awe of laughing joy—that, even then, he had upon him the letter which, more than a week before, he had idly taken from Uille Beag, the lad who carried the few letters in that remote place. It was, as he knew,

having read it, a letter from Ethenn to Ronald Maclaine, her husband, who was then in Tiree, and she somewhere in the Southlands, in her and his home. He loved much to play the evil, bitter seduction of his music; that strange playing upon his feadan which none heard without disquietude, and mayhap fear and that which is deeper than fear. But he smiled when he thought of that letter; and the unspoken words upon his lips were that he was glad he had now two feadans, though one was only a little sheet of paper.

For two hours they had walked the same road that day, having met by the wayside. Then, having had milk and some oat-bread from a woman who had a little croft, they had rested on the heather, and Gloom Achanna had told old tales, old tales that he knew would fill the mind of Alasdair M'Ian with ancient beauty, and with the beauty that does not perish, for that which was, being perfect, is proudly enduring with other than mortal breath.

In this way he won his companion to forgetfulness.

For a time there had been a dreaming silence. A pyot called loudly; a restless plover wheeled this way and that, crying forlornly. There were no other sounds, save when a wandering air whinnied in the gorse or made a strange, faint whistling among the spires of the heather.

With a stealthy movement, Gloom Achanna drew his feadan from its clasps beneath his coat. He put the flute to his mouth and breathed. It was as though birds were flitting to and fro in the moon-

shine, and pale moths of sound fluttered above drowning pools.

Alasdair did not hear, or made no sign. After a time he closed his eyes. It was sweet to lie there, in the honey-fragrant heather, in that remote isle, there where he had first seen the woman of his love; healing-sweet to be away from the great city in the south, from the deep weariness of his life there, from the weariness of men with whom he had so little in common. He was so fevered with the bitter vanity of his love that life had come to mean nothing else to him but the passing of coloured or discoloured moments. If only he might find peace; that, for long, he had wanted more than joy, whose eyes were too sorrowful now.

Out of that great love and passion he had woven beautiful things—Beauty. That was his solace; by that, in that, for that, he lived.

But now he was tired. Too great a weariness had come upon his spirit. He heard other voices than those of Ethlenn whom he loved. They whispered to him by day, and were the forlorn echoes of his dreams.

For Beauty: yes, he would live for that; for his dream, and the weaving anew of that loveliness which made his tired mind wonderful and beautiful as an autumnal glen filled with moonshine. He had strength for this, since he knew that Ethlenn loved him, and loved him with too proud and great a love to be untrue to it even in word or deed, and so far the less in thought. By this he lived.

But now he lay upon the heather, tranced, at rest.

He heard the cold, delicate music float idly above the purple bloom around him. Old fonnnsheen, enchanted airs: these, later, Gloom Achanna played. He smiled when he saw the frown passing from Alasdair's brows, and the lines in the face grow shadowy, and rest dwell beneath the closed eyes.

Then a single, wavering note wandered fitfully across the heather; another, and another. An old, sorrowful air stole through the hush, till the sadness had a cry in it that was as the crying of a lamentation not to be borne. Alasdair stirred, sighing wearily. Below the lashes of his eyes tears gathered. At that, Gloom smiled once more; but in a moment watched again, furtively, with grave, intent gaze.

The air changed, but subtly, as the lift of the wind from grass to swaying foliage. The frown came back into Alasdair's forehead.

'Achanna,' he said suddenly, raising his head and leaning his chin against his hand, with his elbow deep in the heather; 'that was a bitter, cruel letter you sent to your brother, Alasdair, that is now Alan Dall.'

Gloom ceased playing, and quietly blew the damp out of his feadan. Then he looked at it sidelong, and slowly put it away again.

'Yes?' he said at last.

'A bitter, cruel letter, Gloom Achanna!'

'Perhaps you will be having the goodness, Alasdair mac Alasdair, if it is not a weariness to you, to tell me how you came to know of that letter?'

'Your brother Alasdair left it in the house of the woman in Benbecula, when his heart was broken by it, and he went north to the Lews, to find that poor woman he loved, and whom you ruined. And there the good priest, Father Ian Mackellar, found it, and sent it to me, saying, "Here is a worse thing than any told in any of your stories."'

'Well, and what then, Alasdair, who is called Alasdair the Proud?'

'Why am I called that, Achanna?'

'Why? Oh, for why am I called Gloom of the Feadan? Because it is what people see and hear when they see me and hear me. You are proud because you are big and strong; you are proud because you have the kiss of Diarmid; you are proud because you have won great love; you are proud because you have made men and women listen to your songs and tales; you are proud because you are Alasdair M'Ian; you are proud because you dream you are beyond the crushing Hand; you are proud because you are (and not knowing that) feeble as water, and fitful as wind, and weak as a woman.'

Alasdair frowned. What word he was going to say died unsaid.

'Tell me,' he said at last, quietly, 'what made you write these words in that letter: "Brother, because you are a poet, let me tell you this, which is old, ancient wisdom, and not mine alone, that no woman likely to be loved by a poet can be true to a poet"?''

'Why did I write that, Alasdair MacAlasdair?'

‘Yes.’

‘If you read the letter, you know why. I said they were cowards, these loving women whom you poets love, for they will give up all save the lies they love, the lies that save them.’

‘It is a lie. It means nothing, that evil lie of yours.’

‘It means this. They can be true to their lovers, but they cannot be true to love. They love to be loved. They love the love of a poet, for he dreams beauty into them, and they live as other women cannot, for they go clothed in rainbows and moonshine. But . . . what was it that I wrote? They have to choose at last between the steep brae and the easy lily leven; and I am thinking you will not find easily the woman that in her heart of hearts will leave the lily leven for the steep brae. No, not easily.’

‘What do *you* know of love, Gloom Achanna—you, of whom the good Father Ian wrote to me as the most evil of all God’s creatures?’

Gloom smiled across pale lips, with darkening eyes.

‘Did he say that? Sure, it was a hard thing to say. I have done harm to no man that did not harm me; and as to women . . . well, well, for sure, women are women.’

‘It was well that you were named Gloom. You put evil everywhere.’

After that there was silence for a time. Once Achanna put his hand to his feadan again, but withdrew it.

'Shall I be telling you now that old tale of Enya of the Dark Eyes?' he said gently at last, and with soft, persuasive eyes.

Alasdair lay back wearily.

'Yes, tell me that tale.'

'Well, as I was saying, there were crowns lying there, idle gold in the yellow sand, and no man heeded them. And where the long grass waved, there were women's breasts, so still in the brown silence, that the fluttering moths, which shake with the breaths of daisies, motionlessly poised their wings above where so many sighs once were, and where no more was any pulse of joy . . .' And therewith Gloom Achanna told the tale of Enya of the Dark Eyes, and how Aodh (whom he called Alasdair the Proud) loved her overmuch, and in the end lost both kingdom and manhood because of her wanton love that could be the same to him and to Cathba Fleet-foot. And with these words, smiling furtively, he ended the tale—

'This is the story of Alasdair the Proud, Alasdair the Poet-King, who made deathless beauty out of the beauty and love of Enya of the Dark Eyes, who sang the same song to two men.'

When Gloom had come to that part of his tale where he told of what the captive woman said to the king, Alasdair slowly turned and again fixed his gaze on the man who spoke, leaning the while on his elbow as before, with his chin in his hand.

When Achanna finished, neither said any word for a time. Alasdair looked at the man beside him with intent, unwavering gaze. Gloom's eyes were lidded, and he stared into the grass beneath the heather.

'Why did you tell me that tale, Gloom Achanna?'

'Sure, I thought you loved *sgeulan* of the old, ancient days?'

'Why did you tell me that tale?'

Gloom stirred uncasily. But he did not answer, though he lifted his eyes.

'Why did you call the man who loved Enya, Alasdair? It is not a name of that day. And why do you tell me a tale little altered from one that I have already told with my pen?'

'For sure, I forgot that. And you called the man . . . ?'

'I called him Aodh, which was his name. It was Aodh the Proud who loved Enya of the Dark Eyes.'

'Well, well, the end was the same. It was not a good end, that of . . . Aodh the Proud.'

'Why did you tell me that tale?'

Suddenly Achanna rose. He stood, looking down upon Alasdair. 'It is all one,' he said slowly: 'Aodh and Enya, or Alasdair and Ethlenn.'

A deep flush came into Alasdair's face. A splash stained his forehead.

'Ah,' he muttered hoarsely; 'and will you be telling me, Gloom Achanna, what you have to do with that name that you have spoken?'

'Man, you are but a fool, I am thinking, for all

your wisdom. Here is a letter. Read it. It is from Ethlenn Maclaine.'

'From Ethlenn Maclaine?'

'Ay, for sure. But not to you : no, nor yet to me ; but to Ronald Maclaine her man.'

Alasdair rose. He drew proudly back.

'I will not read the letter. The letter is not for me.' Gloom smiled.

'Then I will read it to you, Alasdair M'Ian. It is not a long letter. Oh no ; but it is to Ronald Maclaine.'

Alasdair looked at the man. He said a word in Gaelic that brought a swift darkening into Gloom's eyes. Then, slowly, he moved away.

'A fool is bad ; a blind fool is worse,' cried Achanna mockingly.

Alasdair stopped and turned.

'I will neither look nor hear,' he said. 'What was not meant for me to see or hear, I will not see or hear.'

'Is there madness upon you that you believe in a woman because she asks you to take her pledged word? Do you not know that a pressed woman always falls back upon the man's trusting her absolutely? When she will be knowing that, she can have quiet laughter because of all her shadowy vows and smiling coward lies that are worse than spoken lies. She knows, or thinks she knows, he will be blind and deaf as well as dumb. It is a fine thing that for a proud man, Alasdair M'Ian! It is a fine thing, for sure! And he is a wise man, oh yes, he is a wise man, who will put all his happiness in one

scale of the balance, and his trust in another. It is easy for the woman . . . oh yes, for sure. It is what I would do if I were a woman, what you would do. I would say to the man who loved me, as you love Ethlenn MacLaine, "You must show your love by absolute unquestioning trust." That is how women try to put a cloud about a man's mind. That is how a woman loves to play the game of love. Then, having said that, if I were a woman, I would smile; and then I would go to the other man, and I would be the same with him, and kiss him, and be all tender sweetness to him, and say the same things, and trust him to believe all. It is quite easy to say the same things to two men. I have said to you already, Alasdair M'Ian, that a woman like that is not only untrue to the men who love her, but to love. She cannot say in her heart of hearts, "Love is the one thing." She will say it, yes. first to one, then to the other; and perhaps both will believe. And to herself (she will be sorry for herself) she will say, "I love one for this, and the other for that: they do not clash . . ." knowing well, or perhaps persuading herself so, that this is not a subterfuge. It is the subterfuge of a coward, for she dare not live truly; she must needs be for ever making up to the one what she gives or says to the other. And you . . . you are a poet, they say; and have the thing that makes you see deeper and further and surer; and so it must be you, and not Ronald MacLaine, who will be the one of the two to doubt!' Achanna ceased abruptly, and began laughing.

Alasdair stood still, staring fixedly at him.

'I wish to hear no more,' he said at last quietly, though with a strange, thin, shrill voice; 'I wish to hear no more. Will you go now? if not, then I will go.'

'Wait now, wait now, for sure! Sure, I know the letter off by heart. It goes this way, Alasdair mac Alasdair——'

But putting his hands to his ears, Alasdair again turned aside, and made no sound save with his feet as he trod the crackling undertwigs of the heather.

Gloom swiftly followed. Coming upon Alasdair suddenly and unheard, he thrust the letter before his eyes.

Gloom Achanna smiled as he saw the face of Alasdair the Proud flush deeply again, then grow white and hard, and strangely drawn.

As he did not speak, he muttered against his ears: '*And this is the story of Aodh the Proud, who made deathless beauty out of the beauty and love of Enya of the Dark Eyes, who sang the same song to two men.*'

Still silence.

In a whisper he repeated: 'Who . . . sang . . . the same song . . . to . . . two . . . men.'

A change had come over Alasdair. He was quiet, but his fingers restlessly intertwined. His face twitched. His eyes were strained.

'That is a lie . . . a forgery . . . that letter!' he exclaimed abruptly, in a hoarse voice. 'She did not write it.'

Achanna unfolded the letter again, and handed it

to his companion, who took it, only in the belief that it was Gloom's doing. Alasdair's pulse leaped at the writing he knew so well. He started, and visibly trembled, when he saw and realised the date. The letter fluttered to the ground. When Gloom stooped to pick it up, he noticed that the veins on Alasdair's temples were purple and distended.

From his breast-pocket Alasdair drew another letter. This he unfolded and read. When he had finished, the flush was out of his white face, and was in his brow, where it lay a scarlet splash.

He was dazed, for sure, Gloom thought, as he watched him closely; then suddenly began to play.

For a time Alasdair frowned. Then two tears rolled down his face. His mouth ceased twitching, and a blank idle look came into the dulled eyes.

Suddenly he began laughing.

Gloom Achanna ceased playing for a moment. He watched the man. Then he smiled, and played again.

He played the Dàn-nan-Ròn, which had sent Manùs MacOdrum to his death among the seals; and the Davsa-na-Mairv, to which Sheumais his brother had listened in a sweat of terror; and now he played the dàn which is known as the Pibroch of the Mad. He walked slowly away, playing lightly as he went. He came to a rising ground, and passed over it, and was seen no more. Alasdair stood, intently listening. His limbs shook. Sweat poured from his face. His eyes were distended. A terror that no man can tell, a horror that is beyond words,

was upon him. When he could hear no more, he turned and looked fearfully about him. Suddenly he uttered a hoarse cry. A man stood near him, staring at him curiously. He knew the man. It was himself. He threw up his arms. Then, slowly, he let them fall. It was life or death; he knew that; that he knew. Stumblingly he sank to his knees. He put out wavering hands, wet with falling tears, and cried in a loud, strident voice.

There was no meaning in what he said. But that which was behind what he cried was, '*Lord, deliver me from this evil! Lord, deliver me from this evil!*'

THE AMADAN¹

I

THE fishermen laughed when they saw 'The Amadan,' the fool, miscalculate his leap and fall from the bow of the smack *Tonn* into the shallows. He splashed clumsily, and stared in fear, now at the laughing men, now at the shore.

Stumbling, he waded through the shallows. A gull wheeled above his head, screaming. He screamed back. The men in the *Tonn* laughed.

The Amadan was tall, and seemed prematurely bent; his hair was of a dusty white, though he had not the look of age, but of a man in the prime of life.

It was not a month since Gloom Achanna had played madness upon him. Now, none of his Southland friends would have recognised Alasdair M'lan, Alasdair the Proud. His clothes were torn and soiled; his mien was wild and strange; but the change was from within. The spirit of the man had looked into hell. That was why Alasdair the Proud had become 'The Amadan,' the wandering fool.

It was a long way from Tiree to Askaig in the Lews, or the Long Island, as the Hebrideans call it.

¹ Pronounce Ōmādāun.

Alasdair had made Peter Macaulay laugh by saying that he had been sailing, sailing, from Tiree for a hundred years.

When he stood upon the dry sand, he looked at the smack wonderingly. He waved his hand.

'Where . . . where . . . is Tiree?' he cried. The men laughed at the question and at his voice. Suddenly old Ewan MacEwan rose and took his pipe from his mouth.

'That will do now, men, for sure,' he said quietly. 'It is God that did that. We have laughed too much.'

'Oh,' answered Peter Macaulay, abashed, 'he is only an *amadan*. He does not know whether we laugh or why.'

'God knows.'

'Ay, ay, for sure. Well, to be sure, yes, you will be right in what you say, Ewan.'

With that, Macaulay made as though he would call to the man; but the old man, who was skipper, put him aside.

Ewan went to the bow, and slid over by a rope. He stood for a moment in his sea-boots, with the tide-wash reaching to his knees. Then he waded to the shore and went up to the man who was a fool.

'Tell me, poor man, what is your name.'

'Enya.'

'Ay, that is all you will say. But that is not a man's name. It is a woman's name that. Tell me your name, poor man.'

'Enya—Enya of the Dark Eyes.'

'No, no, now, for sure, you said it was Aodh.'

'Yes; Aodh. Aodh the Proud.'

'Ah, for sure, may God give you peace, poor soul! It is a poor pride, I am fearing.'

The man did not answer.

'And have you no thought now of where you will be going?'

'Yes . . . no . . . yes . . . there is a star in the west.'

'Have you any money, poor man? Well, now, see here; here is a little money. It is a shilling and two pennies. It is all I have. But I have my mind, and God is good. Will you be caring, now, to have my pipe, poor man? A good smoke is a peaceful thing: yes, now, here is my pipe. Take it, take it!'

But Alasdair M'Ian only shook his head. He took the money and looked at it. A troubled look came into his face. Suddenly there were tears in his eyes.

'I remember . . . I remember . . .' he began, stammeringly. 'It is an old saying. It is . . . it is God . . . that builds . . . it is God that builds the nest . . . of the blind bird.'

Ewan MacEwan took off his blue bonnet. Then he looked up into the great terrible silence. God heard.

Before he spoke again, a man came over the high green-laced dune which spilt into the machar beyond the shore. He was blind, and was led by a dog.

Ewan gave a sigh of relief. He knew the man.

It was Alan Dall. There would be help now for the Amadan, if help there could be.

He went towards the blind man, who stopped when he heard steps. 'How tall and thin he was!' thought Ewan. His long, fair hair, streaked with grey, hung almost to his shoulders. His pale face was lit by the beauty of his spirit. It shone like a lamp. Blind though he was, there was a strange living light in his blue eyes.

'Who is it?' he asked, in the Gaelic, and in a voice singularly low and sweet.

'Who is it? I was lying asleep in the warm sand when I heard laughter.'

Ewan MacEwan went close to him, and told all he had to tell.

When he was done, Alan Dall spoke.

'Leave the poor man with me, Ewan my friend. I will guide him to a safe place, and mayhap Himself, to whom be praise, will build the nest that he seeks, blind bird that he is.'

And so it was.

II

It was not till the third day that Alan Dall knew who the Amadan was.

A heavy rain had fallen since morning. Outside the turf bothie where Alan Dall had his brief home, a ceaseless splash made a drowsy peace like the humming of bees. Through it moved in sinuous folds of sound a melancholy sighing, the breathing

of the tide wearily lifting and falling among the heavy masses of wrack which clothed the rocks of the inlet above which the bothie stood.

Since he had eaten of the porridge and milk and coarse bread, brought him by the old woman who came every morning to see to his fire and food, Alan Dall had sat before the peats, brooding upon many things, things of the moment, and the deep insatiable desires of the hungry spirit; but most upon the mystery of the man whom he had brought thither. He slept still, the poor Amadan. It was well; he would not arouse him. The sound of the rain had deep rest in it.

The night before, the Amadan, while staring into the red heart of the peats, had suddenly stirred.

‘What is it?’ Alan had asked gently.

‘My name is Alasdair.’

‘Alasdair? I too . . . I know well one who is named Alasdair.’

‘Is he called Alasdair the Proud?’

‘No; he is not called the Proud.’

‘You have told me that your name is Alan?’

‘Ay. I am called Alan Dall because I am blind.’

‘I have seen your face before, or in a dream, Alan Dall.’

‘And what will your father’s name be, and the name of your father’s fathers?’

‘I do not know that name, nor the name of my clan.’

Thereupon a long silence had fallen. Thrice Alan

spoke, but the Amadan either did not hear, or would make no answer.

An eddy of wind rose and fell. The harsh screaming cry of a heron rent the silence. Then there was silence again.

The Amadan stirred restlessly.

'Who was that?' he asked in a whisper.

'It was no one, Alasdair my friend.'

Alasdair rose and stealthily went to the door. He lifted the latch and looked out.

The dog followed him, whimpering.

'*Hush-sh, Siul!*' whispered Alan Dall.

The dog slipped beyond Alasdair. He put back his ears, and howled.

Alan rose and went to the Amadan, and took him by the sleeve, and so led him back to the stool before the glowing peats.

'Who did you think it was?' he asked, when the Amadan was seated again, and no longer trembled.

'Who was it, Alan Dall?'

'It was a heron.'

'They say herons that cry by night are people out of the grave.'

'It may be so. But there is no harm to them that hear if it is not their hour.'

'It was like a man laughing.'

'Who would laugh, here, in this lonely place, and at night; and for why?'

'I know a man who would laugh here, in this lonely place, and at night, and for why too.'

'Who?'

‘His name is Gloom.’

Alan Dall started. A quiver passed over his face, and his hand trembled.

‘That is a strange name for a man, *Gruaim*. I have heard only of one man who bore that name.’

‘There can be only one man. His name is Gloom Achanna.’

‘*Gruaim Achanna*. Yes . . . I know the man.’

He would not tell the Amadan that this man was his brother; or not yet. He too, then, poor fool, had been caught in the mesh of that evil. And now, perhaps, he would be able to see through the mystery which beset this man whom he had taken to guard and to heal.

But Alasdair M‘Ian said one saying only, and would speak no more; and that saying was, ‘He is not a man; he is a devil.’ Soon after this the Amadan suddenly lapsed into a swoon of sleep, even while words were stammering upon his lips.

But now Alan Dall understood better. A deeper pity, too, was in his heart. This poor man, this Amadan, was indeed his comrade, if his cruel sorrow had come to him through Gloom Achanna.

When he rose in the morning, at the first sobbing of the rainy wind, and saw how profoundly the Amadan slept, he did not wake him.

Thus it was that throughout that long day Alan Dall sat, pondering and dreaming before the peats, while Alasdair the Proud lay drowned in sleep.

The day darkened early, because of the dense

mists which came out of the sea and floated heavily between the myriad grey reeds of the rain and the fluent green and brown which was the ground.

With the dusk the Amadan stirred. Alan Dall crossed to the inset bed, and stood listening intently.

Alasdair muttered strangely in his sleep; and though he had hitherto, save for a few words, spoken in the English tongue, he now used the Gaelic. The listener caught fragments only . . . *an Athair Uibhreach*, the Haughty Father . . . *Agus thug e aoradh dha*, and worshipped him . . . *Biodh uachdaranachd aca*, let them have dominion.

'Those evil ones that go with Gloom my brother,' he muttered; 'those evil spirits have made their kingdom among his dreams.'

'Who are they who are about you?' he whispered.

The Amadan turned, and his lips moved. But it was as though others spoke through him—

*'Cha 'n ann do Shìol Adhamh sinn,
Ach tha sinn de mhuinntir an Athar Uaibhrich.'*¹

Alan Dall hesitated. One of the white prayers of Christ was on his lips, but he remembered also the old wisdom of his fathers. So he kneeled, and said a *seun*, that is strong against the bitter malice of demoniac wiles.

Thereafter he put upon him this *eolas* of healing,

¹ *We are not of the seed of Adam,
But we are the offspring of the Haughty Father.*

touching the brow and the heart as he said *here* and *here*—

‘ Deep peace I breathe into you,
 O weariness, here :
 O ache, here !
 Deep peace, a soft white dove to you ;
 Deep peace, a quiet rain to you ;
 Deep peace, an ebbing wave to you !
 Deep peace, red wind of the east from you ;
 Deep peace, grey wind of the west to you ;
 Deep peace, dark wind of the north from you ;
 Deep peace, blue wind of the south to you !
 Deep peace, pure red of the flame to you ;
 Deep peace, pure white of the moon to you ;
 Deep peace, pure green of the grass to you ;
 Deep peace, pure brown of the earth to you ;
 Deep peace, pure grey of the dew to you,
 Deep peace, pure blue of the sky to you !
 Deep peace of the running wave to you,
 Deep peace of the flowing air to you,
 Deep peace of the quiet earth to you,
 Deep peace of the sleeping stones to you !
 Deep peace of the Yellow Shepherd to you,
 Deep peace of the Wandering Shepherdess to you,
 Deep peace of the Flock of Stars to you,
 Deep peace from the Son of Peace to you,
 Deep peace from the heart of Mary to you,
 And from Bridget of the Mantle
 Deep peace, deep peace !
 And with the kindness too of the Haughty Father,
 Peace !
 In the name of the Three who are One,
 Peace !
 And by the will of the King of the Elements,
 Peace ! Peace !’

Then, for a time he prayed : and, as he prayed, a white and beautiful Image stood beside him, and put soft moonwhite hands upon the brow of the Amadan.

In this wise the beauty of Alan Dall's spirit, that had become a prayer, was created by God into a new immortal spirit.

The Image was as a wavering reed of light, before it stooped and kissed the soul of Alasdair, and was at one with it.

Alasdair opened his eyes. God had healed him.

THE HERDSMAN

I

ON the night when Alan Carmichael with his old servant and friend, Ian M'Ian, arrived in Balnaree ('Baile'-na-Righ'), the little village wherein was all that Borosay had to boast of in the way of civic life, he could not disguise from himself that he was regarded askance.

Rightly or wrongly, he took this to be resentment because of his having wed (alas, he recalled, wed and lost) the daughter of the man who had killed Ailean Carmichael in a duel. So possessed was he by this idea, that he did not remember how little likely the islanders were to know anything of him or his beyond the fact that Ailean MacAlasdair Rhona had died abroad.

The trouble became more than an imaginary one when, on the morrow, he tried to find a boat for the passage to Rona. But for the Frozen Hand, as the triple-peaked hill to the south of Balnaree was called, Rona would have been visible; nor was it, with a fair wind, more than an hour's sail distant.

Nevertheless, he could detect in every one to

whom he spoke a strange reluctance. At last he asked an old man of his own surname why there was so much difficulty.

In the island way, Sheumas Carmichael replied that the people on Ellera, the island adjacent to Rona, were unfriendly.

‘But unfriendly at what?’

‘Well, at this and at that. But for one thing, they are not having any dealings with the Carmichaels. They are all Macneils there, Macneils of Barra. There is a feud, I am thinking; though I know nothing of it; no, not I.’

‘But Sheumas mac Eachainn, you know well yourself that there are almost no Carmichaels to have a feud with! There are you and your brother, and there is your cousin over at Sgòrr-Bhan on the other side of Borosay. Who else is there?’

To this the man could say nothing. Distressed, Alan sought Ian and bade him find out what he could. He also was puzzled and uneasy. That some evil was at work could not be doubted, and that it was secret boded ill.

Ian was a stranger in Borosay because of his absence since boyhood; but, after all, Ian mac Iain mhic Dhonuill was to the islanders one of themselves; and though he came there with a man under a shadow (though this phrase was not used in Ian’s hearing), that was not his fault.

And when he reminded them that for these many years he had not seen the old woman, his sister Giorsal; and spoke of her, and of their long separa-

tion, and of his wish to see her again before he died, there was no more hesitation, but only kindly willingness to help.

Within an hour a boat was ready to take the homefarers to the Isle of Caves, as Rona is sometimes called. Before the hour was gone, they, with the stores of food and other things, were slipping seaward out of Borosay Haven.

The moment the headland was rounded, the heights of Rona came into view. Great gaunt cliffs they are, precipices of black basalt; though on the south side they fall away in grassy declivities which hang a greenness over the wandering wave for ever sobbing round that desolate shore. But it was not till the Sgòrr-Dhu, a conical black rock at the south-east end of the island, was reached, that the stone keep, known as Caisteal-Rhona, came in sight.

It stands at the landward extreme of a rocky ledge, on the margin of a green *àiridh*. Westward is a small dark-blue sea loch, no more than a narrow haven. To the north-west rise precipitous cliffs; northward, above the green pasture and a stretch of heather, is a woodland belt of some three or four hundred pine-trees. It well deserves its poetic name of I-monair, as Aodh the Islander sang of it; for it echoes ceaselessly with wind and wave. If the waves dash against it from the south or east, a loud crying is upon the faces of the rocks; if from the north or north-east, there are unexpected inland silences, but amid the pines a continual voice. It is when the wind blows from the south-west, or the huge

Atlantic billows surge out of the west, that Rona is given over to an indescribable tumult. Through the whole island goes the myriad echo of a continuous booming ; and within this a sound as though waters were pouring through vast hidden conduits in the heart of every precipice, every rock, every boulder. This is because of the sea-arcades of which it consists, for from the westward the island has been honeycombed by the waves. No living man has ever traversed all those mysterious, winding sea-galleries. Many have perished in the attempt. In the olden days the Uistians and Barrovians sought refuge there from the marauding Danes and other pirates out of Lochlin ; and in the time when the last Scottish king took shelter in the west, many of his island followers found safety among these perilous arcades.

Some of them reach an immense height. These are filled with a pale green gloom which in fine weather, and at noon or toward sundown, becomes almost radiant. But most have only a dusky green obscurity, and some are at all times dark with a darkness that has seen neither sun nor moon nor star for unknown ages. Sometimes, there, a phosphorescent wave will spill a livid or a cold blue flame, and for a moment a vast gulf of dripping basalt be revealed ; but day and night, night and day, from year to year, from age to age, that awful wave-clamant darkness is unbroken.

To the few who know some of the secrets of the passages, it is possible, except when a gale blows

from any quarter but the north, to thread these dim arcades in a narrow boat, and so to pass from the Hebrid Seas to the outer Atlantic. But for the unwary there might well be no return; for in that maze of winding galleries and sea-washed, shadowy arcades, confusion is but another name for death. Once bewildered, there is no hope; and the lost adventurer will remain there idly drifting from barren passage to passage, till he perish of hunger and thirst, or, maddened by the strange and appalling gloom and the unbroken silence—for there the muffled voice of the sea is no more than a whisper—leap into the green waters which for ever slide stealthily from ledge to ledge.

Now, as Alan approached his remote home, he thought of these death-haunted corridors, avenues of the grave, as they are called in the 'Cumha Fhir-Mearanach Aonghas mhic Dhonuill'—the Lament of mad Angus Macdonald.

When at last the unwieldy brown coble sailed into the little haven, it was to create unwonted excitement among the few fishermen who put in there frequently for bait. A group of eight or ten was upon the rocky ledge beyond Caisteal-Rhona, among them the elderly woman who was sister to Ian mac Iain.

At Alan's request, Ian went ashore in advance in a small punt. He was to wave his hand if all were well, for Alan could not but feel apprehensive on account of the strange ill-will that had shown itself at Borosay.

It was with relief that he saw the signal when, after Ian had embraced his sister, and shaken hands with all the fishermen, he had explained that the son of Ailean Carmichael was come out of the south, and had come to live a while at Caisteal-Rhona.

All there uncovered and waved their hats. Then a shout of welcome went up, and Alan's heart was glad. But the moment he had set foot on land he saw a startled look come into the eyes of the fishermen—a look that deepened swiftly into one of aversion, almost of fear.

One by one the men moved away, awkward in their embarrassment. Not one came forward with outstretched hand, or said a word of welcome.

At first amazed, then indignant, Ian reproached them. They received his words in ashamed silence. Even when with a bitter tongue he taunted them, they answered nothing.

'Giorsal,' said Ian, turning in despair to his sister, 'is it madness that you have?'

But even she was no longer the same. Her eyes were fixed upon Alan with a look of dread, and indeed of horror. It was unmistakable, and Alan himself was conscious of it, with a strange sinking of the heart. 'Speak, woman!' he demanded. 'What is the meaning of this thing? Why do you and these men look at me askance?'

'God forbid!' answered Giorsal Macdonald with white lips; 'God forbid that we look at the son of Ailean Carmichael askance. But——'

'But what?' •

With that the woman put her apron over her head and moved away, muttering strange words.

‘Ian, what is this mystery?’

‘How am I for knowing, Alan mac Ailean? It is all a darkness to me also. But I will be finding that out soon.’

That, however, was easier for Ian to say than to do. Meanwhile, the brown coble tacked back to Borosay, and the fishermen sailed away to the Barra coasts, and Alan and Ian were left solitary in their wild and remote home.

But in that very solitude Alan found healing. From what Giorsal hinted, he came to believe that the fishermen had experienced one of those strange dream-waves which, in remote isles, occur at times, when whole communities will be wrought by the self-same fantasy. When day by day went past, and no one came near, he at first was puzzled, and even resentful; but this passed, and soon he was glad to be alone. Ian, however, knew that there was another cause for the inexplicable aversion that had been shown. But he was silent, and kept a patient watch for the hour that the future held in its shroud. As for Giorsal, she was dumb; but no more looked at Alan askance.

And so the weeks went. Occasionally a fishing smack came with the provisions, for the weekly despatch of which Alan had arranged at Loch Boisdale, and sometimes the Barra men put in at the haven, though they would never stay long, and always avoided Alan as much as was possible.

In that time Alan and Ian came to know and love

their strangely beautiful island home. Hours and hours at a time they spent exploring the dim, green, winding sea-galleries, till at last they knew the chief arcades thoroughly.

They had even ventured into some of the narrow, snake-like inner passages, but never for long, because of the awe and dread these held, silent estuaries of the grave.

Week after week passed, and to Alan it was as the going of the grey owl's wing, swift and silent.

Then it was that, on a day of the days, he was suddenly stricken with a new and startling dread.

II

In the hour that this terror came upon him Alan was alone upon the high slopes of Rona, where the grass fails and the lichen yellows at close on a thousand feet above the sea.

The day had been cloudless since sunrise. The sea was as the single vast petal of an azure flower, all of one unbroken blue save for the shadows of the scattered isles and the slow-drifting mauve or purple of floating weed. Countless birds congregated from every quarter. Guillemots and puffins, cormorants and northern divers, everywhere darted, swam, or slept upon the listless ocean, whose deep breathing no more than lifted a league-long calm, here and there, to lapse breathlike as it rose. Through the not

less silent quietudes of air the grey skuas swept with curving flight, and the narrow-winged terns made a constant white shimmer. At remote altitudes the gannet motionlessly drifted. Oceanward the great widths of calm were rent now and again by the shoulders of the porpoises which followed the herring trail, their huge, black, revolving bodies looming large above the silent wave. Not a boat was visible anywhere; not even upon the most distant horizons did a brown sail fleck itself duskily against the skyward wall of steely blue.

In the great stillness which prevailed, the noise of the surf beating around the promontory of Aonaig was audible as a whisper; though even in that windless hour the confused rumour of the sea, moving through the arcades of the island, filled the hollow of the air overhead. Ever since the early morning Alan had moved under a strange gloom. Out of that golden glory of midsummer a breath of joyous life should have reached his heart, but it was not so. For sure, there is sometimes in the quiet beauty of summer an air of menace, a premonition of suspended force—a force antagonistic and terrible. All who have lived in these lonely isles know the peculiar intensity of this summer melancholy. No noise of wind, no prolonged season of untimely rains, no long baffling of mists in all the drear inclemencies of that remote region, can produce the same ominous and even paralysing gloom sometimes born of inferable peace and beauty. Is it that in the

human soul there is mysterious kinship with the outer soul which we call Nature ; and that in these few supreme hours which come at the full of the year, we are, sometimes, suddenly aware of the tremendous forces beneath and behind us, momentarily quiescent ?

Determined to shake off this dejection, Alan wandered high among the upland solitudes. There a cool air moved always, even in the noons of August ; and there, indeed, often had come upon him a deep peace. But whatsoever the reason, only a deeper despondency possessed him. An incident, significant in that mood, at that time, happened then. A few hundred yards away from where he stood, half hidden in a little glen where a fall of water tossed its spray among the shadows of rowan and birch, was the bothie of a woman, the wife of Neil MacNeill, a fisherman of Aonaig. She was there, he knew, for the summer pasturing ; and even as he recollected this, he heard the sound of her voice as she sang somewhere by the burnside. Moving slowly toward the corrie, he stopped at a mountain ash which overhung a pool. Looking down, he saw the woman, Morag MacNeill, washing and peeling potatoes in the clear brown water. And as she washed and peeled, she sang an old-time shealing hymn of the Virgin-Shepherdess, of Michael the White, and of Columán the Dove. It was a song that, years ago, far away in Brittany, he had heard from his mother's lips. He listened now to every word of the doubly familiar Gaelic ; and

when Morag ended, the tears were in his eyes, and he stood for a while as one under a spell¹—

'A Mhicheil mhin ! nan steud geala,
A choisin cios air Dragon fala,
Air ghaol Dia 'us Mhic Muire,
Sgaoil do sgiath oirnn dian sinn uile,
Sgaoil do sgiath oirnn dian sinn uile.

A Mhoire ghradhach ! Mathair Uain-ghil,
Cobhair oirne, Oigh na h-uaisle ;
A rioghainn uai'reach ! a bhuachaille nan treud !
Cum ar cuallach cuartaich sinn le cheil,
Cum ar cuallach cuartaich sinn le cheil.

A Chalum-Chille ! chairdeil, chaoimh,
An ainm Athar, Mic, 'us Spioraid Naoimh,
Trid na Trithinn ! trid na Triath !
Comraig sinne, gleidh ar trial,
Comraig sinne, gleidh ar trial.

Athair ! A Mhic ! A Spioraid Naoimh !
Bi 'eadh an Tri-Aon leinn, a la's a dh-oidhche !
'S air chul nan tonn, no air thaobh nam beann,
Bi 'dh ar Mathair leinn, 's bith a lamh fo'r ceann,
Bi 'dh ar Mathair leinn, 's bith a lamh fo'r ceann.

Thou gentle Michael of the white steed,
Who subdued the Dragon of blood,
For love of God and the Son of Mary,
Spread over us thy wing, shield us all !
Spread over us thy wing, shield us all !

Mary beloved ! Mother of the White Lamb,
Protect us, thou Virgin of nobleness,
Queen of beauty ! Shepherdess of the flocks !
Keep our cattle, surround us together,
Keep our cattle, surround us together.

¹ This poem was taken down in the Gaelic and translated by Mr. Alexander Carmichael of South Uist.

Thou Colomba, the friendly, the kind,
In name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit Holy,
Through the Three-in-One, through the Three,
Encompass us, guard our procession,
Encompass us, guard our procession.

Thou Father ! thou Son ! thou Spirit Holy !
Be the Three-in-One with us day and night.
And on the crested wave, or on the mountain-side,
Our Mother is there, and her arm is under our head,
Our Mother is there, and her arm is under our head.'

Alan found himself repeating whisperingly, and again and again—

'Bi 'eadh an Tri-Aon leinn, a la's a dh-oidhche !
'S air chul nan tonn, no air thaobh nam beann.'

Suddenly the woman glanced upward, perhaps because of the shadow that moved against the green bracken below. With a startled gesture she sprang to her feet. Alan looked at her kindly, saying, with a smile, 'Sure, Morag nic Tormod, it is not fear you need be having of one who is your friend.' Then, seeing that the woman stared at him with something of terror as well as surprise, he spoke to her again.

'Sure, Morag, I am no stranger that you should be looking at me with those foreign eyes.' He laughed as he spoke, and made as though he were about to descend to the burnside. Unmistakably, however, the woman did not desire his company. He saw this, with the pain and bewilderment which had come upon him whenever the like happened, as so often it had happened since he had come to Rona.

'Tell me, Morag MacNeill, what is the meaning of

this strangeness that is upon you? Why do you not speak? Why do you turn away your head?’

Suddenly the woman flashed her black eyes upon him.

‘Have you ever heard of *am Buachaill Bàn—am Buachaill Buidhe*?’

He looked at her in amaze. *Am Buachaill Bàn!* . . . The fair-haired Herdsman, the yellow-haired Herdsman! What could she mean? In days gone by, he knew, the islanders, in the evil time after Culloden, had so named the fugitive Prince who had sought shelter in the Hebrides; and in some of the runes of an older day still the Saviour of the World was sometimes so called, just as Mary was called *Bhuachaile nan treud*—Shepherdess of the Flock. But it could be no allusion to either of these that was intended.

‘Who is the Herdsman of whom you speak, Morag?’

‘Is it no knowledge you have of him at all, Alan MacAilean?’

‘None. I know nothing of the man, nothing of what is in your mind. Who is the Herdsman?’

‘You will not be putting evil upon me because that you saw me here by the pool before I saw you?’

‘Why should I, woman? Why do you think that I have the power of the evil eye? Sure, I have done no harm to you or yours, and wish none. But if it is for peace to you to know it, it is no evil I wish you, but only good. The Blessing of Himself be upon you and yours and upon your house!’

The woman looked relieved, but still cast her furtive gaze upon Alan, who no longer attempted to join her.

'I cannot be speaking the thing that is in my mind, Alan MacAilean. It is not for me to be saying that thing. But if you have no knowledge of the Herdsman, sure it is only another wonder of the wonders, and God has the sun on that shadow, to the Stones be it said.'

'But tell me, Morag, who is the Herdsman of whom you speak?'

For a minute or more the woman stood regarding him intently. Then slowly, and with obvious reluctance, she spoke—

'Why have you appeared to the people upon the isle, sometimes by moonlight, sometimes by day or in the dusk, and have foretold upon one and all who dwell here black gloom and the red flame of sorrow? Why have you, who are an outcast because of what lies between you and another, pretended to be a messenger of the Son—ay, for sure, even, God forgive you, to be the Son Himself?'

Alan stared at the woman. For a time he could utter no word. Had some extraordinary delusion spread among the islanders, and was there in the insane accusation of this woman the secret of that which had so troubled him?

'This is all an empty darkness to me, Morag. Speak more plainly, woman. What is all this madness that you say? When have I spoken of having any mission, or of being other than I am? ~~When~~ have I foretold evil upon you or yours, or upon the

isles beyond? What man has ever dared to say that Alan MacAilean of Rona is an outcast? And what sin is it that lies between me and another of which you know?’

It was impossible for Morag MacNeill to doubt the sincerity of the man who spoke to her. She crossed herself, and muttered the words of a *seun* for the protection of the soul against the demon powers. Still, even while she believed in Alan’s sincerity, she could not reconcile it with that terrible and strange mystery with which rumour had filled her ears. So, having nothing to say in reply to his eager questions, she cast down her eyes and kept silence.

‘Speak, Morag, for Heaven’s sake! Speak if you are a true woman; you that see a man in sore pain, in pain, too, for that of which he knows nothing, and of the ill of which he is guiltless!’

But, keeping her face averted, the woman muttered simply, ‘I have no more to say.’ With that she turned and moved slowly along the pathway which led from the pool to her hillside bothie.

With a sigh, Alan walked slowly away. What wonder, he thought, that deep gloom had been upon him that day? Here, in the woman’s mysterious words, was the shadow of that shadow.

Slowly, brooding deep over what he had heard, he crossed the Monadh-nan-Con, as the hill-tract there was called, till he came to the rocky wilderness known as the Slope of the Caverns.

~~There~~ for a time he leaned against a high boulder, idly watching a few sheep nibbling the short grass

which grew about some of the many caves which opened in slits or wide hollows. Below and beyond he saw the pale blue silence of the sea meet the pale blue silence of the sky; south-westward, the grey film of the coast of Ulster; westward, again the illimitable vast of sea and sky, infinitudes of calm, as though the blue silence of heaven breathed in that one motionless wave, as though that wave sighed and drew the horizons to its heart. From where he stood he could hear the murmur of the surge whispering all round the isle; the surge that, even on days of profound stillness, makes a murmurous rumour among the rocks and shingle of the island shores. Not upon the moor-side, but in the blank hollows of the caves around him, he heard, as in gigantic shells, the moving of a strange and solemn rhythm: wave-haunted shells indeed, for the echo that was bruited from one to the other came from beneath, from out of those labyrinthine passages and dim, shadowy sea-arcades, where among the melancholy green glooms the Atlantic waters lose themselves in a vain wandering.

For long he leaned there, revolving in his mind the mystery of Morag MacNeill's words. Then, abruptly, the stillness was broken by the sound of a dislodged stone. So little did he expect the foot of fellow-man, that he did not turn at what he thought to be the slip of a sheep. But when upon the slope of the grass, a little way beyond where he stood, a dusky blue shadow wavered fantastically, he swung round with a sudden instinct of dread.

And this was the dread which, after these long weeks since he had come to Rona, was upon Alan Carmichael.

For there, standing quietly by another boulder, at the mouth of another cave, was a man in all appearance identical with himself. Looking at this apparition, he beheld one of the same height as himself, with hair of the same hue, with eyes the same and features the same, with the same carriage, the same smile, the same expression. No, there, and there alone, was any difference.

Sick at heart, Alan wondered if he looked upon his own wraith. Familiar with the legends of his people, it would have been no strange thing to him that there, upon the hillside, should appear the wraith of himself. Had not old Ian MacIain—and that, too, though far away in a strange land—seen the death of his mother moving upward from her feet to her knees, from her knees to her waist, from her waist to her neck, and, just before the end, how the shroud darkened along the face until it hid the eyes? Had he not often heard from her, from Ian, of the second self which so often appears beside the living when already the shadow of doom is upon him whose hours are numbered? Was this, then, the reason of what had been his inexplicable gloom? Was he indeed at the extreme of life? Was his soul amid shallows, already a rock upon a blank, inhospitable shore? If not, who or what was this second self which leaned there negligently, looking at him with scornful smiling lips, but with intent, unsmiling eyes.

Slowly there came into his mind this thought: How could a phantom, that was itself intangible, throw a shadow upon the grass, as though it were a living body? Sure, a shadow there was indeed. It lay between the apparition and himself. A legend heard in boyhood came back to him; instinctively he stooped and lifted a stone and flung it midway into the shadow.

‘Go back into the darkness,’ he cried, ‘if out of the darkness you came; but if you be a living thing, put out your hands!’

The shadow remained motionless. When Alan looked again at his second self, he saw that the scorn which had been upon the lips was now in the eyes also. Ay, for sure, scornful silent laughter it was that lay in those cold wells of light. No phantom that; a man he, even as Alan himself. His heart pulsed like that of a trapped bird, but with the spoken word his courage came back to him.

‘Who are you?’ he asked, in a voice strange even in his own ears.

‘*Am Buachaill*,’ replied the man in a voice as low and strange. ‘I am the Herdsman.’

A new tide of fear surged in upon Alan. That voice, was it not his own? that tone, was it not familiar in his ears? When the man spoke, he heard himself speak; sure, if he were *Am Buachaill Bàn*, Alan, too, was the Herdsman, though what fantastic destiny might be his was all unknown to him.

‘Come near,’ said the man, and now the mocking

light in his eyes was wild as cloud-fire — ‘come near, oh *Buachaill Bàn*!’

With a swift movement, Alan sprang forward ; but as he leaped, his foot caught in a spray of heather, and he stumbled and fell. When he rose, he looked in vain for the man who had called him. There was not a sign, not a trace of any living being. For the first few moments he believed it had all been a delusion. Mortal being did not appear and vanish in that ghostly way. Still, surely he could not have mistaken the blank of that place for a speaking voice, nor out of nothingness have fashioned the living phantom of himself? Or could he? With that, he strode forward and peered into the wide arch of the cavern by which the man had stood. He could not see far into it ; but so far as it was possible to see, he discerned neither man nor shadow of man, nor anything that stirred ; no, not even the gossamer bloom of a *beàrnan-brìde*, that grew on a patch of grass a yard or two within the darkness, had lost one of its delicate filmy spires. He drew back, dismayed. Then, suddenly, his heart leaped again, for beyond all question, all possible doubt, there, in the bent thyme, just where the man had stood, was the imprint of his feet. Even now the green sprays were moving forward.

III

An hour passed, and Alan Carmichael had not moved from the entrance to the cave. So still was he that a ewe, listlessly wandering in search of cooler

grass, lay down after a while, drowsily regarding him with her amber-coloured eyes. All his thought was upon the mystery of what he had seen. No delusion this, he was sure. That was a man whom he had seen. But who could he be? On so small an island, inhabited by less than a score of crofters, it was scarcely possible for one to live for many weeks and not know the name and face of every soul. Still, a stranger might have come. Only, if this were so, why should he call himself the Herdsman? There was but one herdsman on Rhona, and he Angus MacCormic, who lived at Einaval on the north side. In these outer isles, the shepherd and the herdsman are appointed by the community, and no man is allowed to be one or the other at will, any more than to be *maor*. Then, too, if this man were indeed herdsman, where was his *iomair-ionailtair*, his browsing tract? Looking round him, Alan could perceive nowhere any fitting pasture. Surely no herdsman would be content with such an *iomair a bhuachaill*—rig of the herdsman—as that rocky wilderness where the soft green grass grew in patches under this or that boulder, on the sun side of this or that rocky ledge. Again, he had given no name, but called himself simply *Am Buachaill*. This was how the woman Morag had spoken; did she indeed mean this very man? and if so, what lay in her words? But far beyond all other bewilderment for him was that strange, that indeed terrifying likeness to himself—a likeness so absolute, so convincing, that he knew he might himself easily have been deceived, had he

beheld the apparition in any place where it was possible that a reflection could have misled him.

Brooding thus, eye and ear were both alert for the faintest sight or sound. But from the interior of the cavern not a breath came. Once, from among the jagged rocks high on the west slope of Ben Einaval, he fancied he heard an unwonted sound—that of human laughter, but laughter so wild, so remote, so unmirthful, that fear was in his heart. It could not be other than imagination, he said to himself; for in that lonely place there was none to wander idly at that season, and none who, wandering, would laugh there solitary.

It was with an effort that Alan at last determined to probe the mystery. Stooping, he moved cautiously into the cavern, and groped his way along the narrow passage which led, as he thought, into another larger cave. But this proved to be one of the innumerable blind ways which intersect the honeycombed slopes of the Isle of Caves. To wander far in these lightless passages would be to track death. Long ago the piper whom the Prionnsa-Bàn, the Fair Prince, loved to hear in his exile—he that was called Rory M'Vurich—penetrated one of the larger hollows to seek there for a child that had idly wandered into the dark. Some of the clansmen, with the father and mother of the little one, waited at the entrance to the cave. For a time there was silence; then, as agreed upon, the sound of the pipes was heard, to which a man named Lachlan M'Lachlan replied from the outer air. The skirl of the pipes within grew

fainter and fainter. Louder and louder Lachlan played upon his chanter; deeper and deeper grew the wild moaning of the drone; but for all that, fainter and fainter waned the sound of the pipes of Rory M'Vurich. Generations have come and gone upon the isle, and still no man has heard the returning air which Rory was to play. He may have found the little child, but he never found his backward path, and in the gloom of that honeycombed hill he and the child and the music of the pipes lapsed into the same stillness. Remembering this legend, familiar to him since his boyhood, Alan did not dare to venture further. At any moment, too, he knew he might fall into one of the crevices which opened into the sea-corridors hundreds of feet below. Ancient rumour had it that there were mysterious passages from the upper heights of Ben Einaval which led into the heart of this perilous maze. But for a time he lay still, straining every sense. Convinced at last that the man whom he sought had evaded all possible quest, he turned to regain the light. Brief way as he had gone, this was no easy thing to do. For a few moments, indeed, Alan lost his self-possession when he found a uniform dusk about him, and could not discern which of the several branching narrow corridors was that by which he had come. But following the greener light, he reached the cave, and soon, with a sigh of relief, was upon the sun-sweet warm earth again.

How more than ever beautiful the world seemed! how sweet to the eyes were upland and cliff, the

wide stretch of ocean, the flying birds, the sheep grazing on the scanty pastures, and, above all, the homely blue smoke curling faintly upward from the fisher crofts on the headland east of Aonaig!

Purposely he retraced his steps by the way of the glen: he would see the woman Morag MacNeill again, and insist on some more explicit word. But when he reached the burnside once more, the woman was not there. Possibly she had seen him coming, and guessed his purpose; half he surmised this, for the peats in the hearth were brightly aglow, and on the hob beside them the boiling water hissed in a great iron pot wherein were potatoes. In vain he sought, in vain called. Impatient, he walked around the bothie and into the little byre beyond. The place was deserted. This, small matter as it was, added to his disquietude. Resolved to sift the mystery, he walked swiftly down the slope. By the old shealing of Cnoc-na-Monie, now forsaken, his heart leaped at sight of Ian coming to meet him.

When they met, Alan put his hands lovingly on the old man's shoulders, and looked at him with questioning eyes. He found rest and hope in those deep pools of quiet light, whence the faithful love rose comfortingly to meet his own yearning gaze.

'What is it, Alan-mo-ghray; what is the trouble that is upon you?'

'It is a trouble, Ian, but one of which I can speak little, for it is little I know.'

'Now, now, for sure you must tell me what it is.'

'I have seen a man here upon Roga whom I have

not seen or met before, and it is one whose face is known to me, and whose voice too, and one whom I would not meet again.'

'Did he give you no name?'

'None.'

'Where did he come from? Where did he go to?'

'He came out of the shadow, and into the shadow he went.'

Ian looked steadfastly at Alan, his wistful gaze searching deep into his unquiet eyes, and thence from feature to feature of the face which had become strangely worn of late.

But he questioned no further.

'I, too, Alan MacAilean, have heard a strange thing to-day. You know old Marsail Macrae? She is ill now with a slow fever, and she thinks that the shadow which she saw lying upon her hearth last Sabbath, when nothing was there to cause any shadow, was her own death, come for her, and now waiting there. I spoke to the old woman, but she would not have peace, and her eyes looked at me.

"What will it be now, Marsail?" I asked.

"Ay, ay, for sure," she said, "it was I who saw you first."

"Saw me first, Marsail?"

"Ay, you and Alan MacAilean."

"When and where was this sight upon you?"

"It was one month before you and he came to Rhona."

'I asked the poor old woman to be telling me her meaning. At first I could make little of what was

said, for she muttered low, an' moved her head this way and that, an' moaned like a stricken ewe. But on my taking her hand, she looked at me again, and then told me this thing—

“On the seventh day of the month before you came—and by the same token it was on the seventh day of the month following that you and Alan MacAilean came to Caisteal-Rhona—I was upon the shore at Aonaig, listening to the crying of the wind against the great cliff of Biola-creag. With me were Ruaridh Macrae and Neil MacNeill, Morag MacNeill, and her sister Elsa; and we were singing the hymn for those who were out on the wild sea that was roaring white against the cliffs of Berneray, for some of our people were there, and we feared for them. Sometimes one sang, and sometimes another. And, sure, it is remembering I am, how, when I had called out with my old wailing voice—

“Bi 'eadh an Tri-aon leinn, a la's a dh-oidche;
'S air chul nan tonn, A Mhoire ghradhach!

(Be the Three-in-One with us day and night;
And on the crested wave, O Mary Belovèd!)

“Now when I had just sung this, and we were all listening to the sound of it caught by the wind and blown up against the black face of Biola-creag, I saw a boat come sailing into the haven. I called out to those about me, but they looked at me with white faces, for no boat was there, and it was a rough, wild sea it was in that haven.

“And in that boat I saw three people sitting; and one was you, Ian MacIain, and one was Alan MacAilean, and one was a man who had his face in shadow, and his eyes looked into the shadow at his feet. I saw you clear, and told those about me what I saw. And Seumas MacNeill, him that is dead now, and brother to Neil here at Aonaig, he said to me, ‘Who was that whom you saw walking in the dusk the night before last?’ — ‘Ailean MacAlasdair Carmichael,’ answered one at that. Seumas muttered, looking at those about him, ‘Mark what I say, for it is a true thing—that Ailean Carmichael of Rhona is dead now, because Marsail saw him walking in the dusk when he was not upon the island; and now, you Neil, and you Rory, and all of you, will be for thinking with me that one of the men in the boat whom Marsail sees now will be the son of him who has changed.’

“Well, well, it is a true thing that we each of us thought that thought, but when the days went and nothing more came of it, the memory of the seeing went too. Then there came the day when the coble of Aulay MacAulay came out of Borosay into Caisteal-Rhona haven. Glad we were to see your face again, Ian MacIain, and to hear the sob of joy coming out of the heart of Giorsal your sister; but when you and Alan MacAilean came on shore, it was my voice that then went from mouth to mouth, for I whispered to Morag MacNeill who was next me that you were the men I had seen in the boat.”

‘Well, after that,’ Ian added, with a grave smile, ‘I spoke gently to old Marsail, and told her that there was no evil in that seeing, and that for sure it was nothing at all, at all, to see two people in a boat, and nothing coming of that, save happiness for those two, and glad content to be here.

‘Marsail looked at me with big eyes.

‘But when I asked her what she meant by that, she would say no more. No asking of mine would bring the word to her lips, only she shook her head and kept her gaze from my face. Then, seeing that it was useless, I said to her—

“‘Marsail, tell me this: Was this sight of yours the sole thing that made the people here on Rona look askance at Alan MacAilean?’”

‘For a time she stared at me with dim eyes, then suddenly she spoke—

“‘It is not all.’”

“‘Then what more is there, Marsail Macrae?’”

“‘That is not for the saying. I have no more to say. Let you, or Alan MacAilean, go elsewhere. That which is to be, will be. To each his own end.’”

“‘Then be telling me this now at least,’ I asked: “‘is there danger for him or me in this island?’”

‘But the poor old woman would say no more, and then I saw a swoon was on her.’

After this, Alan and Ian walked slowly home together, both silent, and each revolving in his mind as in a dim dusk that mystery which, vague and unreal at first, had now become a living presence, and haunted them by day and night.

IV

'In the shadow of pain, one may hear the footsteps of joy.' So runs a proverb of old.

It was a true saying for Alan. That night he lay down in pain, his heart heavy with the weight of a mysterious burden. On the morrow he woke blithely to a new day—a day of absolute beauty. The whole wide wilderness of ocean was of living azure, aflame with gold and silver. Around the promontories of the isles the brown-sailed fishing-boats of Barra and Berneray, of Borosay and Seila, moved blithely hither and thither. Everywhere the rhythm of life pulsed swift and strong. The first sound which had awakened Alan was of a loud singing of fishermen who were putting out from Aonaig. The coming of a great shoal of mackerel had been signalled, and every man and woman of the near isles was alert for the take. The watchers had known it by the swift congregation of birds, particularly the gannets and skuas. And as the men pulled at the oars, or hoisted the brown sails, they sang a snatch of an old-world tune, still chanted at the first coming of the birds when spring-tide is on the flow again—

'Bui' cheas dha 'n Ti thaine na Gugachan
 Thaine's na h-Eoin-Mhora cuideriu,
 Cailin dugh ciaru bo's a chro!
 Bo dhonn! bo dhonn! bo dhonn bheadarrach!
 Bo dhonn a ruin a bhlitheadh am baine dhuit
 Ho ro! mo gheallag! ni gu rodagach!
 Cailin dugh ciaru bo's a chro—
 Na h-eoin ajr tighinn! cluinneam an ceol!'

(Thanks to the Being, the Gannets have come,
Yes ! and the Great Auks along with them.
Dark-haired girl !—a cow in the fold !
Brown cow ! brown cow ! brown cow, beloved ho !
Brown cow ! my love ! the milker of milk to thee !
Ho ro ! my fair-skinned girl—a cow in the fold,
And the birds have come !—glad sight, I see !)

Eager to be of help, Ian put off in his boat, and was soon among the fishermen, who in their new excitement were forgetful of all else than that the mackerel were come, and that every moment was precious. For the first time Ian found himself no unwelcome comrade. Was it, he wondered, because that, there upon the sea, whatever of shadow dwelled about him, or rather about Alan MacAilean, on the land, was no longer visible.

All through that golden noon he and the others worked hard. From isle to isle went the chorus of the splashing oars and splashing nets; of the splashing of the fish and the splashing of gannets and gulls; of the splashing of the tide leaping blithely against the sun-dazzle, and the illimitable rippling splash moving out of the west;—all this blent with the loud, joyous cries, the laughter, and the hoarse shouts of the men of Barra and the adjacent islands. It was close upon dusk before the Rhona boats put into the haven of Aonaig again; and by that time none was blither than Ian MacIain, who in that day of happy toil had lost all the gloom and apprehension of the day before, and now returned to Caisteal-Rhona with lighter heart than he had known for long.

When, however, he got there, there was no sign of Alan. He had gone, said Giorsal, he had gone out in the smaller boat midway in the afternoon, and had sailed around to Aoidhu, the great scaur which ran out beyond the precipices at the south-west of Rhona.

This Alan often did, and of late more and more often. Ever since he had come to the Hebrid Isles his love of the sea had deepened, and had grown into a passion for its mystery and beauty. Of late, too, something impelled to a more frequent isolation, a deep longing to be where no eye could see and no ear hearken.

So at first Ian was in no way alarmed. But when the sun had set, and over the faint blue film of the Isle of Tiree the moon had risen, and still no sign of Alan, he became restless and uneasy. Giorsal begged him in vain to eat of the supper she had prepared. Idly he moved to and fro along the rocky ledge, or down by the pebbly shore, or across the green *àiridh*, eager for a glimpse of him whom he loved so well.

At last, unable longer to endure a growing anxiety, he put out in his boat, and sailed swiftly before the slight easterly breeze which had prevailed since moonrise. So far as Aoidhu, all the way from Aonaig, there was not a haven anywhere, nor even one of the sea caverns which honeycombed the isle beyond the headland. A glance, therefore, showed him that Alan had not yet come back that way. It was possible, though unlikely, that he had sailed right round Rona; unlikely, because in the narrow

straits to the north, between Rona and the scattered islets known as the Innsemhara, strong currents prevailed, and particularly at the full of the tide, when they swept north-eastward dark and swift as a mill-race.

Once the headland was passed and the sheer precipitous westward cliffs loomed black out of the sea, he became more and more uneasy. As yet, there was no danger; but he saw that a swell was moving out of the west; and whenever the wind blew that way, the sea arcades were filled with a lifting, perilous wave. Later, escape might be difficult, and often impossible. Out of the score or more great passages which opened between Aoidhu and Ardgorm, it was difficult to know into which to chance the search of Alan. Together they had examined all of them. Some twisted but slightly; others wound sinuously till the green, serpentine alleys, flanked by basalt walls hundreds of feet high, lost themselves in an indistinguishable maze.

But that which was safest, and wherein a boat could most easily make its way against wind or tide, was the huge, cavernous passage known locally as the Uaimh-nan-roin, the Cave of the Seals.

For this opening Ian steered his boat. Soon he was within the wide corridor. Like the great cave at Staffa, it was wrought as an aisle in some natural cathedral; the rocks, too, were columnar, and rose in flawless symmetry, as though graven by the hand of man. At the far end of this gigantic aisle, there diverges a long, narrow arcade, filled by day with

the green shine of the water, and by night, when the moon is up, with a pale froth of light. It is one of the few where there are open gateways for the sea and the wandering light, and by its spherical shape almost the only safe passage in a season of heavy wind. Half-way along this arched arcade a corridor leads to a round cup-like cavern, midway in which stands a huge mass of black basalt, in shape suggestive of a titanic altar. Thus it must have impressed the imagination of the islanders of old; for by them, even in a remote day, it was called Teampull-Mara, the Temple of the Sea. Owing to the narrowness of the passage, and to the smooth, unbroken walls which rise sheer from the green depths into an invisible darkness, the Strait of the Temple is not one wherein to linger long, save in a time of calm.

Instinctively, however, Ian quietly headed his boat along this narrow way. When, silently, he emerged from the arcade, he could just discern the mass of basalt at the far end of the cavern. But there, seated in his boat, was Alan, apparently idly adrift, for one oar floated in the water alongside, and the other swung listlessly from the tholes.

His heart had a suffocating grip as he saw him whom he had come to seek. Why that absolute stillness, that strange, listless indifference? For a dreadful moment he feared death had indeed come to him in that lonely place where, as an ancient legend had it, a woman of old time had perished, and ever since had wrought death upon any who came thither, solitary and unhappy.

But at the striking of the shaft of his oar against a ledge, Alan moved, and looked at him with startled eyes. Half rising from where he crouched in the stern, he called to him in a voice that had in it something strangely unfamiliar.

‘I will not hear!’ he cried. ‘I will not hear! Leave me! Leave me!’

Fearing that the desolation of the place had wrought upon his mind, Ian swiftly moved toward him, and the next moment his boat glided alongside. Stepping from the one to the other, he kneeled beside him.

‘*Ailcan mo caraid, Ailean-aghray*, what is it? What gives you dread? There is no harm here. All is well. Look! See, it is I, Ian—old Ian MacIain! Listen, *mo ghaoil*; do you not know me—do you not know who I am? It is I, Ian; Ian who loves you!’

Even in that obscure light he could clearly discern the pale face, and his heart smote him as he saw Alan’s eyes turn upon him with a glance wild and mournful. Had he indeed succumbed to the sea madness which ever and again strikes into a terrible melancholy one here and there among those who dwell in the remote isles? But even as he looked, he noted another expression come into the wild strained eyes; and almost before he realised what had happened, Alan was on his feet and pointing with rigid arm.

For there, in that nigh unreachable and for ever unvisited solitude, was the figure of a man. He stood

on the summit of the huge basalt altar, and appeared to have sprung from out the rock, or, himself a shadowy presence, to have grown out of the obscure unrealities of the darkness. Ian stared, fascinated, speechless.

Then with a spring he was on the ledge. Swift and sure as a wild cat, he scaled the huge mass of the altar.

Nothing; no one! There was not a trace of any human being. Not a bird, not a bat; nothing. Moreover, even in that slowly blackening darkness, he could see that there was no direct connection between the summit or side with the blank, precipitous wall of basalt beyond. Overhead there was, so far as he could discern, a vault. No human being could have descended through that perilous gulf.

Was the island haunted? he wondered, as slowly he made his way back to the boat. Or had he been startled into some wild fantasy, and imagined a likeness where none had been? Perhaps even he had not really seen any one. He had heard of such things. The nerves can soon chase the mind into the shadow wherein it loses itself.

Or was Alan the vain dreamer? That, indeed, might well be. Mayhap he had heard some fantastic tale from Morag MacNeill, or from old Marsail Macrae; the islanders had *sgeul* after *sgeul* of a wild strangeness.

In silence he guided the boats back into the outer arcade, where a faint sheen of moonlight glistened on the water. Thence, in a few minutes, he perceived that

wherein he and Alan sat, with the other fastened astern, into the open.

When the moonshine lay full on Alan's face, Ian saw that he was thinking neither of himself nor of where he was. His eyes were heavy with dream.

What wind there was blew against their course, so Ian rowed unceasingly. In silence they passed once again the headland of Aoidhu; in silence they drifted past a single light gleaming in a croft near Aonaig—a red eye staring out into the shadow of the sea, from the room where the woman Marsail lay dying; and in silence their keels grided on the patch of shingle in Caisteal-Rhona haven.

For days thereafter Alan haunted that rocky, cavernous wilderness where he had seen the Herdsman.

It was in vain he had sought everywhere for some tidings of this mysterious dweller in those upland solitudes. At times he believed that there was indeed some one upon the island of whom, for inexplicable reasons, none there would speak; but at last he came to the conviction that what he had seen was an apparition, projected by the fantasy of overwrought nerves. Even from the woman Morag MacNeill, to whom he had gone with a frank appeal that won its way to her heart, he learned no more than that an old legend, of which she did not care to speak, was in some way associated with his own coming to Rona.

Ian, too, never once alluded to the mysterious

incident of the green arcades which had so deeply impressed them both: never after Alan had told him that he had seen a vision.

But as the days passed, and as no word came to either of any unknown person who was on the island, and as Alan, for all his patient wandering and furtive quest, both among the upland caves and in the green arcades, found absolutely no traces of him whom he sought, the belief that he had been duped by his imagination deepened almost to conviction.

As for Ian, he, unlike Alan, became more and more convinced that what he had seen was indeed no apparition. Whatever lingering doubt he had was dissipated on the eve of the night when old Marsail Macrae died. It was dusk when word came to Caisteal-Rhona that Marsail felt the cold wind on the soles of her feet. Ian went to her at once, and it was in the dark hour which followed that he heard once more, and more fully, the strange story which, like a poisonous weed, had taken root in the minds of the islanders. Already from Marsail he had heard of the Prophet, though, strangely enough, he had never breathed word of this to Alan, not even when, after the startling episode of the apparition in the Teampull-Mara, he had, as he believed, seen the Prophet himself. But there in the darkness of the low, turfed cottage, with no light in the room save the dull red gloom from the heart of the smooored peats, Marsail, in the attenuated, remote voice of those who have already entered into the vale of the shadow, told him this thing, in the homelier Gaelic—

‘Yes, Ian mac Iain-Bàn, I will be telling you this thing before I change. You are for knowing, sure, that long ago Uilleam, brother of him who was father to the lad up at the castle yonder, had a son? Yes, you know that, you say, and also that he was called Donnacha Bàn? No, mo-caraid, that is not a true thing that you have heard, that Donnacha Bàn went under the wave years ago. He was the seventh son, and was born under the full moon; ’tis Himself will be knowing whether that was for or against him. Of these seven none lived beyond childhood except the two youngest, Kenneth and Donnacha. Kenneth was always frail as a February flower, but he lived to be a man. He and his brother never spoke, for a feud was between them, not only because that each was unlike the other, and the younger hated the older because thus he was the penniless one, but most because both loved the same woman. I am not for telling you the whole story now, for the breath in my body will soon blow out in the draught that is coming upon me; but this I will say to you: darker and darker grew the gloom between these brothers. When Giorsal Macdonald gave her love to Kenneth, Donnacha disappeared for a time. Then, one day, he came back to Borosay, and smiled quietly with his cold eyes when they wondered at his coming again. Now, too, it was noticed that he no longer had an ill-will upon his brother, but spoke smoothly with him and loved to be in his company. But to this day no one knows for sure what happened. For there was a gloaming when Donnacha Bàn came

back alone in his sailing-boat. He and Kenneth had sailed forth, he said, to shoot seals in the sea-arcades to the west of Rona, but in these dark and lonely passages they had missed each other. At last he had heard Kenneth's voice calling for help, but when he had got to the place it was too late, for his brother had been seized with the cramps, and had sunk deep into the fathomless water. There is no getting a body again that sinks in these sea-galleries. The crabs know that.

‘Well, this and much more was what Donnacha Bànn told to his people. None believed him; but what could any do? There was no proof; none had ever seen them enter the sea-caves together. Not that Donnacha Bànn sought in any way to keep back those who would fain know more. Not so; he strove to help to find the body. Nevertheless, none believed; and Giorsal nic Dugall Mòr least of all. The blight of that sorrow went to her heart. She had death soon, poor thing! but before the cold greyness was upon her she told her father, and the minister that was there, that she knew Donnacha Bànn had murdered his brother. One might be saying these were the wild words of a woman; but, for sure, no one said that thing upon Borosay or Rona, or any of these isles. When all was done, the minister told what he knew, and what he thought, to the Lord of the South Isles, and asked what was to be put upon Donnacha Bànn. “Exile for ever,” said the chief, “or if he stays here, the doom of silence. Let no man or woman speak to him or

give him food or drink, or give him shelter, or let his shadow cross his or hers."

'When this thing was told to Donnacha Bàn Carmichael, he laughed at first; but as day after day slid over the rocks where all days fall, he laughed no more. Soon he saw that the chief's word was no empty word; and yet he would not go away from his own place. He could not stay upon Borosay, for his father cursed him; and no man can stay upon the island where a father's curse moves this way and that, for ever seeking him. Then, some say a madness came upon him, and others that he took wildness to be his way, and others that God put upon him the shadow of loneliness, so that he might meet sorrow there and repent. Howsoever that may be, Donnacha Bàn came to Rona, and, by the same token, it was the year of the great blight, when the potatoes and the corn came to naught, and when the fish in the sea swam away from the isles. In the autumn of that year there was not a soul left on Rona except Giorsal and the old man Ian, her father, who had guard of Caisteal-Rhona for him who was absent. When, once more, years after, smoke rose from the crofts, the saying spread that Donnacha Bàn, the murderer, had made his home among the caves of the upper part of the isle. None knew how this saying rose, for he was seen of none. The last man who saw him—and that was a year later—was old Padruic M'Vurich the shepherd. Padruic said that, as he was driving his ewes across the north slope of Ben Einayal in the gloaming, he came upon a silent

figure seated upon a rock, with his chin in his hands, and his elbows on his knees—with the great, sad eyes of him staring at the moon that was lifting itself out of the sea. Padruic did not know who the man was. The shepherd had few wits, poor man! and he had known, or remembered, little about the story of Donnacha Bàn Carmichael; so when he spoke to the man, it was as to a stranger. The man looked at him and said—

“You are Padruic M’Vurich, the shepherd.”

‘At that a trembling was upon old Padruic, who had the wonder that this stranger should know who and what he was.

“And who will you be, and forgive the saying?” he asked.

“*Am Fàidh*—the Prophet,” the man said.

“And what prophet will you be, and what is your prophecy?” asked Padruic.

“I am here because I wait for what is to be, and that will be the coming of the Woman who is the Daughter of God.”

‘And with that the man said no more, and the old shepherd went down through the gloaming, and, heavy with the thoughts that troubled him, followed his ewes down into Aonaig. But after that neither he nor any other saw or heard tell of the shadowy stranger; so that all upon Rona felt sure that Padruic had beheld no more than a vision. There were some who thought that he had seen the ghost of the outlaw Donnacha Bàn; and mayhap one or two who wondered if the stranger that had said he

was a prophet was not Donnacha Bàn himself, with a madness come upon him ; but at last these sayings went out to sea upon the wind, and men forgot. But, and it was months and months afterwards, and three days before his own death, old Padruic M'Vurich was sitting in the sunset on the rocky ledge in front of his brother's croft, where then he was staying, when he heard a strange crying of seals. He thought little of that ; only, when he looked closer, he saw, in the hollow of the wave hard by that ledge, a drifting body.

“*Am Fàidh — Am Fàidh !*” he cried ; “the Prophet, the Prophet !”

‘At that his brother and his brother’s wife ran to see ; but it was nothing that they saw. “It would be a seal,” said Pòl M'Vurich ; but at that Padruic had shook his head, and said no for sure, he had seen the face of the dead man, and it was of him whom he had met on the hillside, and that had said he was the Prophet who was waiting there for the second coming of God.

‘And that is how there came about the echo of the thought that Donnacha Bàn had at last, after his madness, gone under the green wave and was dead. For all that, in the months which followed, more than one man said he had seen a figure high up on the hill. The old wisdom says that when God comes again, or the prophet who will come before, it will be as a herdsman on a lonely isle. More than one of the old people on Rona and Borosay remembered that *sgéul* of the *Seanachas* that the tale-tellers

knew. There were some who said that Donnacha Bàn had never been drowned at all, and that he was this Prophct, this Herdsman. Others would not have that saying at all, but believed that the wraith was indeed Am Buachaill Bàn, the Fair-haired Shepherd, who had come again to redeem the people out of their sorrow. There were even those who said that the Herdsman who haunted Rona was no other than Kenneth Carmichael himself, who had not died but had had the mind-dark there in the sea-caves where he had been lost, and there had come to the knowledge of secret things, and so was at last Am Fàidh Chrìosd.'

A great weakness came upon the old woman when she had spoken thus far. Ian feared that she would have breath for no further word; but after a thin gasping, and a listless fluttering of weak hands upon the coverlet, whereon her trembling fingers plucked aimlessly at the invisible blossoms of death, she opened her eyes once more, and stared in a dim questioning at him who sat by her bedside.

'Tell me,' whispered Ian, 'tell me, Marsail, what thought it is that is in your own mind?'

But already the old woman had begun to wander.

'For sure, for sure,' she muttered, '*Am Fàidh . . . Am Fàidh . . .* an' a child will be born . . . the Queen of Heaven, an' . . . that will be the voice of Domhuill, my husband, I am hearing . . . an' dark it is, an' the tide comin' in . . . an'——'

Then, sure, the tide came in, and if in that dark-

ness old Marsail Macrae heard any voice at all, it was that of Domhuill who years ago had sunk into the wild seas off the head of Barra.

An hour later Alan walked slowly under the cloudy night. All he had heard from Ian came back to him with a strange familiarity. Something of this, at least, he had known before. Some hints of this mysterious Herdsman had reached his ears. In some inexplicable way his real or imaginary presence there upon Rona seemed a pre-ordained thing for him.

He knew that the wild imaginings of the islanders had woven the legend of the Prophet, or of his mysterious message, out of the loom of the deep longing whereon is woven that larger tapestry, the shadow-thridden life of the island Gael. Laughter and tears, ordinary hopes and pleasures, and even joy itself, and bright gaiety, and the swift spontaneous imaginations of susceptible natures—all this, of course, is to be found with the island Gael as with his fellows elsewhere. But every here and there are some who have in their minds the inheritance from the dim past of their race, and are oppressed as no other people are oppressed by the gloom of a strife between spiritual emotion and material facts. It is the brains of dreamers such as these which clear the mental life of the community; and it is in these brains are the mysterious looms which weave the tragic and sorrowful tapestries of Celtic thought. It were a madness to suppose that life in the isles consists of nothing but sadness or

melancholy. It is not so, or need not be so, for the Gael is a creature of shadow and shine. But whatever the people is, the brain of the Gael hears a music that is sadder than any music there is, and has for its cloudy sky a gloom that shall not go; for the end is near, and upon the westernmost shores of these remote isles the voice of Celtic sorrow may be heard crying, '*Cha till, cha till, cha till mi tuille*': 'I will return, I will return, I will return no more.'

Alan knew all this well; and yet he too dreamed his dream—that, even yet, there might be redemption for the people. He did not share the wild hope which some of the older islanders held, that Christ Himself shall come again to redeem an oppressed race; but might not another saviour arise, another redeeming spirit come into the world? And if so, might not that child of joy be born out of suffering and sorrow and crime; and if so, might not the Herdsman be indeed a prophet, the Prophet of the Woman in whom God should come anew as foretold?

With startled eyes he crossed the thyme-set ledge whereon stood Caisteal-Rhona. Was it, after all, a message he had received, and was that which had appeared to him in that lonely cavern of the sea but a phantom of his own destiny? Was he himself, Alan Carmichael, indeed *Am Fàidh*, the predestined Prophet of the isles?

V

Ever since the night of Marsail's death, Ian had noticed that Alan no longer doubted, but that in some way a special message had come to him, a special revelation. On the other hand, he had himself swung further into his conviction that the vision he had seen in the cavern was, in truth, that of a living man. On Borosay, he knew, the fishermen believed that the *apnaran nan creag*, the recluse of the rocks, as commonly they spoke of him, was no other than Donnacha Bàn Carmichael, survived there through these many years, and long since mad with his loneliness and because of the burden of his crime.

But by this time the islanders had come to see that Alan MacAilean was certainly not Donnacha Bàn. Even the startling likeness no longer betrayed them in this way. The ministers and the priests on Berneray and Barra scoffed at the whole story, and everywhere discouraged the idea that Donnacha Bàn could still be among the living. But for the common belief that to encounter the Herdsman, whether the lost soul of Donnacha Bàn or indeed the strange phantom of the hills of which the old legends spoke, was to meet inevitable disaster, the islanders might have been persuaded to make such a search among the caves of Rona as would almost certainly have revealed the presence of any who dwelt therein.

But as summer lapsed into autumn, and autumn

itself through its golden silences waned into the shadow of the equinox, a strange, brooding serenity came upon Alan. Ian himself now doubted his own vision of the mysterious Herdsman—if he indeed existed at all except in the imaginations of those who spoke of him either as the *Buachail Bàn*, or as the *aonaràn nan creag*. If a real man, Ian believed that at last he had passed away. None saw the Herdsman now; and even Morag MacNeill, who had often on moonlight nights been startled by the sound of a voice chanting among the upper solitudes, admitted that she now heard nothing unusual.

St. Martin's summer came at last, and with it all that wonderful, dreamlike beauty which bathes the isles in a flood of golden light, and draws over sea and land a veil of deeper mystery.

One late afternoon, Ian, returning to Caisteal-Rhona after an unexplained absence of several hours, found Alan sitting at a table. Spread before him were the sheets of one of the strange old Gaelic tales which he had ardently begun to translate. Alan lifted and slowly read the page of paraphrase which he had just laid down. It was after the homelier Gaelic of the *Eachdair eachd Challum mhic Cruimein*.

'And when that king had come to the island, he lived there in the shadow of men's eyes; for none saw him by day or by night, and none knew whence he came or whither he fared; for his feet were shod with silence, and his way with dusk. But men knew that he was there, and all feared him. Months, even years, tramped one on the heels of the other, and

perhaps the king gave no sign, but one day he would give a sign; and that sign was a laughing that was heard somewhere, upon the lonely hills, or on the lonely wave, or in the heart of him who heard. And whenever the king laughed, he who heard would fare ere long from his fellows to join that king in the shadow. But sometimes the king laughed only because of vain hopes and wild imaginings, for upon these he lives as well as upon the strange savours of mortality.'

That night Alan awakened Ian, suddenly, and taking him by the hand made him promise to go with him on the morrow to the Teampull-Mara.

In vain Ian questioned him as to why he asked this thing. All Alan would say was that he must go there once again, and with him, for he believed that a spirit out of heaven had come to reveal to him a wonder. Distressed by what he knew to be a madness, and fearful that it might prove to be no passing fantasy, Ian would fain have persuaded him against this intention. Even as he spoke, however, he realised that it might be better to accede to his wishes, and, above all, to be there with him, so that it might not be one only who heard or saw the expected revelation.

And it was a strange faring indeed, that which occurred on the morrow. At noon, when the tide was an hour turned in the ebb, they sailed westward from Caisteal-Rhona. It was in silence they made that strange journey together; for, while Ian steered, Alan lay down in the hollow of the boat, with his

head against the old man's knees, and slept, or at least lay still with his eyes closed.

When at last they passed the headland and entered the first of the sea-arcades, Alan rose and sat beside him. Hauling down the now useless sail, Ian took an oar and, standing at the prow, urged the boat inward along the narrow corridor which led to the huge sea-cave of the Altar.

In the deep gloom—for even on that day of golden light and beauty the green air of the sea-cave was heavy with shadow—there was a deathly chill. What dull light there was came from the sheen of the green water which lay motionless along the black basaltic ledges. When at last the base of the Altar was reached, Ian secured the boat by a rope passed around a projecting spur, and then seated himself in the stern beside Alan.

‘Tell me, Alan-a-ghaoil, what is this thing that you are thinking you will hear or see?’

Alan looked at him strangely for a while, but, though his lips moved, he said nothing.

‘Tell me, my heart,’ Ian urged again, ‘who is it you expect to see or hear?’

‘*Am Buachaill Bàn*,’ Alan answered, ‘the Herdsman.’

For a moment Ian hesitated. Then, taking Alan's hand in his and raising it to his lips, he whispered in his ear—

‘There is no Herdsman upon Rona. If a man was there who lived solitary, the *aonaran nan creag* is dead long since. What you have seen and heard

has been a preying upon you of wild thoughts. Be thinking no more now of this vision.'

'This man,' Alan answered quietly, 'is not Donnacha Bàn, but the Prophet of whom the people speak. He himself has told me this thing. Yesterday I was here, and he bade me come again. He spoke out of the shadow that is about the Altar, though I saw him not. I asked him if he were Donnacha Bàn, and he said "No." I asked him if he were *Am Fàidh*, and he said "Yes." I asked him if he were indeed an immortal spirit and herald of that which was to be, and he said "Even so."'

For a long while after this no word was spoken. The chill of that remote place began to affect Alan, and he shivered slightly at times. But more he shivered because of the silence, and because that he who had promised to be there gave no sign. Sure, he thought, it could not be all a dream; sure, the Herdsman would come again.

Then at last, turning to Ian, he said, 'We must come on the morrow, for to-day he is not here.'

'I will do what you ask, Alan-mo-ghaol.'

But of a sudden Alan stepped on the black ledges at the base of the Altar, and slowly mounted the precipitous rock.

Ian watched him till he became a shadow in that darkness. His heart leaped when suddenly he heard a cry fall out of the gloom.

'Alan, Alan!' he cried, and a great fear was upon him when no answer came; but at last he heard him clambering, slowly down the perilous slope of that

obscure place. When he reached the ledge Alan stood still regarding him.

'Why do you not come into the boat?' Ian asked, terrified because of what he saw in Alan's eyes.

Alan looked at him with parted lips, his breath coming and going like that of a caged bird.

'What is it?' Ian whispered.

'Ian, when I reached the top of the Altar, and in the dim light that was there, I saw the dead body of a man lying upon the rock. His head was lain back so that the gleam from a crevice in the cliff overhead fell upon it. The man has been dead many hours. He is a man whose hair has been greyed by years and sorrow, but the man is he who is of my blood; he whom I resemble so closely; he that the fishermen call the hermit of the rocks; he that is the Herdsman.'

Ian stared, with moving lips: then in a whisper he spoke—

'Would you be for following a herdsman who could lead you to no fold? This man is dead, Alan mac Alasdair; and it is well that you brought me here to-day. That is a good thing, and for sure God has willed it.'

'It is not a man that is dead. It is my soul that lies there. It is dead. God called me to be His Prophet, and I hid in dreams. It is the end.' And with that, and death staring out of his eyes, he entered the boat and sat down beside Ian.

'Let us go,' he said, and that was all.

Slowly Ian oared the boat across the shadowy

gulf of the cave, along the narrow passage, and into the pale green gloom of the outer cavern, wherein the sound of the sea made a forlorn requiem in his ears.

But the short November day was already passing to its end. All the sea westward was aflame with gold and crimson light, and in the great dome of the sky a wonderful radiance lifted above the paleness of the clouds, whose pinnaced and bastioned heights towered in the south-west.

A faint wind blew eastwardly. Raising the sail, Ian made it fast and then sat down beside Alan. But he, rising, moved along the boat to the mast, and leaned there with his face against the setting sun.

Idly they drifted onward. Deep silence lay between them; deep silence was all about them, save for the ceaseless, inarticulate murmur of the sea, the splash of low waves against the rocks of Rona, and the sigh of the surf at the base of the basalt precipices.

And this was their homeward sailing on that day of revelation: Alan, with his back against the mast, and his lifeless face irradiated by the light of the setting sun; Ian, steering, with his face in shadow.

II

M

*'I have tried to feed myself on hopes and dreams
all through these years.'*

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN.

•

*'Come to me in my dreams, and then
By day I shall be well again!
For so the night will more than pay
The hopeless longing of the day.'*

*'Some there are who do thus in beauty love
each other.'*

MAETERLINCK : La Beauté Intérieure.

THE BOOK OF THE OPAL

WHEN my kinsman Ambrose Stuart died last year, he left me many papers, family documents, and the MS. of a book, the third and final part of it unfinished. He died, where for some years he had lived, in Venice. I remember when he went: it was to join his intimate friend and foster-brother, Carolan Stuart, spiritual head of a House of Rest there: and he left his birth-isle in the Hebrides because he could no longer be a priest, having found a wisdom older than that he professed, and gods more ancient than his own, and a vision of august beauty, that was not greater than that which dreaming souls see through the incense of the Church—because there is no greater or lesser beauty in the domain of the spirit, but only Beauty—but was to him higher in its heights and deeper in its depths.

The first part of this book is his own story, from childhood to manhood: a story of a remote life, remotely lived; of a singular and pathetic loneliness. The second deals with his thoughts and dreams in Rome during his novitiate, his life in Paris, his priesthood in the Southern Hebrides. The third, and much the longest, though unfinished, is less a narrative than a journal, and begins from the day when

he first knew that the prayers in his mind shaped themselves otherwise than as they came to his lips ; and that old forgotten wisdom of his people came nearer to his spirit than many sacred words, which, to him, were not the wind, but the infinite circling maze of leaves blown before the wind.

The papers were, for the most part, pages written during those dull days of idle or perplexed thought which came between this change and his abrupt relinquishing of the priesthood. They are not pleasant to me. A bitter spirit inhabits them, a spirit of the flesh, and the things of the flesh, and of the dust. Among the latest are one or two of which I am glad, for they show that he sought evil, or if not evil, the common ways of evil, as a man will take a poison to avert death.

The third part of the book comes to within a few days of his death. It deals with his life in Venice : with his inner life, for he lived solitary, and went little among his fellows, and for the most part dwelled with Father Carolan at the Casa San Spirito in the Rio del Occidente.

It was there I saw him a week before his death. I was in Italy, where I had gone for a light and warm air, after a northern winter damp and bleak beyond any I have known : and when I had a letter from him, begging me to leave my friends and to come to Venice to see him before death put him beyond these too many dreams, I went.

From these papers, from that unfinished book, I learned much of a singular and perplexing nature.

I believe more readily now that a man or woman may be possessed: or, that two spirits may inhabit the same body, as fire and air together inhabit a jet of flame.

'I am shaken with desire,' he writes in one place, 'and not any wind can blow that fire out of my heart. There is no room for even one little flaming word of God in my heart. When I am not shaken with desires, it is only because I am become Desire. And my desire is all evil. It is not of the mind or of the body only, but is of the mind and the body and the spirit. It is my pleasure to deny God. I have no fear. Sweet, intolerable lust possesses me.'

And yet, within a page or two of where these words are, and written later on the same day, I find: 'There is a star within me which guides me through all darkness. Pride is evil, but there is a pride which great angels know, they who do not stoop, who hear but do not listen. What are all desires but dust to the feet? I fear above all things the unforgiving love of Him who has dominion. But great love, great hope, these touch with immortal lips my phantom frailties. What day can be vain when I know within myself that I am kin to spirits who do not pass as smoke and flame?'

But because one can understand a man best from what reach he has or had, than from any or all of his poor fallings away, I learned more from a vellum-bound MS. book, written also on vellum, as though he held it as his particular and most intimate utterance, which he gave me the day before he died. For there

are many among us who become transparent through the light of their imagination: who, when they mould images of thought and dream, reveal their true selves with an insight that is at once beautiful and terrible. My friend was of these: and I recall seldom, and with ever less heed, the morbid agonies and elations, the bitter perversities, the idle veering of shaken thought, to remember what he wrote, not openly of himself or his own apparent life and yet wholly and poignantly and convincingly of himself, and of one whom he loved, in *The Book of the Opal*.

He gave me also the rare and beautiful stone after which he had named his book. He told me that it possessed occult powers, but whether of itself, or in the making of its perfect beauty, he could not say; or simply because of its beauty, and because perfect beauty has an infinite radiation and can attract not only influences, but powers. It may well be so.

I read often in this *Book of the Opal*. It is, to me, as the sea is, or the wind: for, like the unseen and homeless creature which in the beginning God breathed between the lips of Heat and Cold, it is full of unbidden meanings and has sighs and laughers: and, like the sea, it has limits and shallows, but holds the stars, and has depths where light is dim and only the still, breathless soul listens; and has a sudden voice that is old as day and night, and is fed with dews and rains, and is salt and bitter.

It was not his will that it should be given to others. 'I would like three to read it,' he said: 'then, in time, it will be moonlight in many minds.'

and, through the few, thousands will know all in it that has deep meaning for any but myself. For now I am a husbandman who knows he shall not reap what he has sown, but is content if even one seed only sink and rise. I see a forest of souls staring at the stars which are the fruit of the tree that shall grow from that single seed.'

This that he desired may or may not be: for there is another Husbandman who garners in His own way and at His own time. But the seed has been sown: and three have read *The Book of the Opal*.

When I reached him I saw in his face the shadow of that ill which none may gainsay. He was on a sofa which had been drawn close to the window. The house was in a poor and unfrequented part, but the windows looked across the Laguna Morte, and from the roof-garden one might see at sundown the spires of Padua, like white gossamer caught in that vast thicket of flame and delicate rose which was the West.

It was at this hour, at a sundown such as this, that I saw him. Already the sweat of death was on his brow, though he lived, as in a tremulous, uncertain balance of light and shadow, for seven days.

His mind dwelled almost wholly upon ancient things: old mysteries, old myths, gods and demoniac powers, dreams, and the august revelation of eternal beauty.

One afternoon he gave me four small objects, of which three were made of ivory and gold, and the

fourth was a stone or rounded slab of basalt double-sphered with gold.

I asked him what meaning they had, for I knew he gave them with meaning

‘Do you not know?’ he said. One was the small image of a sword, the other of a spear, the third of a cup.

Then I knew that he had given me the symbols of the four quarters of the earth, and of all the worlds of the universe: the stone for the North, the sword for the East, the spear for the South, and the cup for the West.

‘Hold the sword against the light that I may see it,’ he whispered; adding, after a while: ‘I am tired of all thoughts of glory and wonder, of power, and of love that divides.’

The next day, at sundown, he asked me to hold the little gold and ivory spear against the light. ‘I am tired,’ he said, ‘of all thoughts of dominion, of great kingdoms and empires that come and pass, of insatiable desires, and all that goes forth to smite and to conquer.’

On the day that followed I held before his dimmed eyes the little gold and ivory cup, white as milk in the pale gold of a rain-clear windy set. ‘I am tired,’ he said, ‘of all thoughts of dreams that outlive the grave, and of fearless eyes looking at the stars, and of old heroisms, and mystery, and the beauty of all beauty.’

It was on the next day he died. At noon his faint breath bade me lift the dark stone of basalt, though

he could not see that which I held before his eyes. I saw the shadow in his closed eyelids become tremulous and pale blue, like faint, wind-shaken smoke.

'I am tired,' he whispered, 'of all thoughts of darkness and terror, of cold, and all majesties of silence and shadow: of the ending of radiant and noble things become ignoble: of the dropped spear and the rusted sword and the uplifted cup: and of age, that alone is mortal among elemental things.'

When I put the stone on the marble by his side, not more still or white than that other silent thing which lay beside it, I knew that of the eternal symbols of which he has so often written in *The Book of the Opal*, one he had for ever relinquished. With him, in that new passage, he had the spear, and the sword, and the little infinite cup that the tears of one heart might fill and yet not all the dews of the incalculable stars cause to overflow.

THE WELLS OF PEACE

WHEN Ian Mòr, of whom elsewhere I have spoken so often, was a man in the midway of life, he sought the Wells of Peace.

All his life long he had desired other things. But when a man has lived deeply he comes at last to long for rest. Beauty, joy, life, these may be his desire: but soon or late he will seek the Wells of Peace.

I speak of a man such as Ian Mòr was. There is too vast a concourse of those who herd ignobly among the low levels of desire: of these I do not speak, knowing little of them, for there are stars in my inner life that guide my stumbling feet elsewhere and otherwise.

He has quiet now. There is sleep upon his brain that was so tired. There is balm upon his spirit. He has peace, there, where he lies in deep, unheeding rest, under a rowan on a green hillside.

When he was ill with the death-weariness, though none saw signs of that, for it was from within, I asked him once what was the thing he remembered best out of life—he who had lived so deeply, and was a poet and dreamer, and had loved with the great love.

He answered me in the Gaelic—he loved. It is

a saying of the people; but to me never common now, who see in the words the colour of his deep enduring loneliness.

'Deireadh gach comuinn, sgaoileadh; deireadh gach cogaidh, sìth'—the end of all meetings, parting: the end of all striving, peace. *'Deireadh gach cogaidh, sìth'*: I have slept often to the quiet music of that.

When he was in the midway of life, Ian Mòr went deep and far into the dark valley of weariness. The beauty of the world, the mystery of the human soul, the flame-like ecstasy of his dream: these sustained him. And when, at last, the radiance was without mystery, and the mystery without vista; when the loveliness of light and shadow over all the green earth and ancient hills and ever-changeable, unchanging sea, was a mere idle pageant for tired eyes—then was he sustained only by the star of his love. Far away she was. God knows in what unplumbed, fathomless depths of loneliness the following love pursues its quest. Afar off, he loved. Fair star of his redemption: he could always discern that light through the darkness of his homeless heart.

She was of the old heroic mould. 'Joy and deep love,' he said to her once, 'these will be our stars.' She smiled gravely in whispering back, 'And strength and endurance.'

Through how many strange gulfs he had sailed, through what hazardous straits, against what adverse winds and tides, before he set his course for the one haven he had never found; that port which each

mariner on the sea of life has heard of, which many have descried across the running wave, which ever and again a few have found and entered : the blue quietudes of the haven of Peace.

I do not remember when it was that Ian Mòr went forth upon his quest. He was in the midway of life, that I know ; and he arose one day from where he lay upon the hillside, dreaming an old, sweet, impossible dream. It is enough.

He went down the hillside of Ben Maiseach, through the still purpled heather and the goldening bracken. Behind him the slopes rose pale blue, with isles of deeper azure where a few drifting clouds trailed their shadows across the upland moors. Beneath him, and just beyond the Glen of the Willows, the Gorromalt Water made a few shimmering curves of light among the green of hazel-thickets and fern ; farther, the low hills broke into a serrated crest, as of a spent and broken billow. Beyond, lay a single, long, suspensive wave, immutable, pale as turquoise, ethereal as blue smoke. It was the sea.

A quiet region. Few crofts lightened the hillsides. Scanty pastures twisted this way and that among the granite boulders and endless green surf of fern.

On that solitary way, from the end of Monanair to where the path of the Glen of the Willows diverges, Ian Mòr met no one. In the glen itself he passed a woman, a tinker's wife, dishevelled, with sullen eyes and ignoble mien, carrying wearily a sleeping child.

He spoke, but she gave no other answer than a dull stare.

He passed her, dreaming his dream. A redbreast, who had found his fall-o'-the-leaf song, flew before him a while, fluting brief cries.

'Ah, birdeen, birdeen,' he cried, 'be the bird of the rainbow and lead me to my love.'

But the redbreast fluttered idly into a thicket of red-brown bramble, and Ian walked slowly on. Something lay upon his heart.

'Lead me to my love,' he muttered over and over.

Suddenly he turned and moved swiftly back. When he came upon the woman he smiled, and said again in the sweet, homely Gaelic, 'God be with you, and a quiet night.' The sullen eyes wandered idly over him.

'Let me help you,' he asked.

She held out her hand, the hollow palm upward. But when he said simply that he had no money, she cursed him.

'You are weary, poor woman,' he added, taking no notice of her bitter words. 'Let me carry the child for you a bit. Sure, 'tis a heavy weight at the end o' the day, but not so heavy as the burden o' want and the hand o' sorrow.'

The woman looked at Ian suspiciously, but at last she gave him the child.

For a time they walked in silence, side by side.

'Is the child a lass or boy?' Ian asked after a while.

'A lassie, worse luck.'

His heart yearned. He looked into the little one's eyes, for she had wakened, and the last light of day was in those deep-blue pools, so fathomless and quiet.

Ian remembered a song he had made, years and years before, when his life was green as June, and his heart glad as May, and his thought light as April. The memory came running like a freshet over a barren course. Tears welled from his heart into his eyes. And so, remembering, he sang in a low, murmuring voice—

'Ah, Eily, Eily, Eily, dear to me, dear and sweet,
In dreams I am hearing the sound of your little running feet ;
The sound of your running feet that like the sea-hoofs beat
A music by day and night, Eily, on the sands of my heart, my
sweet.

Eily, Eily, Eily, put off your wee hands from the heart o' me :
It is pain they are making there, where no more pain should
be ;

For little running feet, an' wee white hands, an' croodlin' as of
the sea,

Bring tears to my eyes . . . tears, tears, out o' the heart o' me,
Mo lennav-a-chree,
Mo lennav-a-chree !'

While he sang, low as it was, the woman trudged on seemingly unhearing. When he ceased she spoke, with choking words and a gasp in her throat.

'Sing those last lines over again.'

Ian glanced at her. Putting the child over into the hollow of his right arm, he slipped his hand into

that of the tattered, dishevelled woman, as she tramped wearily on, her sullen eyes now red. He sang low :

‘For little running feet, an’ wee white hands, an’ croodlin’ as of
the sea,
Bring tears to my eyes . . . tears, tears, out o’ the heart o’ me,
Mo lennav-a-chree,
Mo lennav-a-chree !’

‘Why is there weeping upon you, poor woman?’ he asked of her, in the kindly idiom of those who have the Gaelic.

Suddenly she stopped, and leaned against a birch ; her breast shook with sobs.

For long she sobbed with bitter tears. Gently Ian soothed her out of the deep, warm pity that was ever in his heart for poor, sorrowful women. Soon she told him. The child he carried was not hers, but that of the woman her tinker-husband had taken to himself when she, his wife, proved barren.

‘An’ I’ve only one hope,’ she cried, ‘an’ only one dream, an’ that’s to feel the wee white hands, an’ to hear the running feet, and to hear the croodlin’ as of the sea, of my own, own bairn.’

Looking upon the poor vagrant, Ian’s heart melted in pity. Deep, wonderful love of the mother, that could court hunger and privation and misery and all else as dross only for the kiss of little lips, the light in little eyes, the mothering touch. The poor, uncomely wench, he thought : for sure, for sure, Mary, the Mother of All, called to her from afar off, with sister-sweet whispering and deep compassionate love.

They talked no more till they came to the little inn at the far end of the Glen of the Willows. The man there knew Ian Mòr, and so promised readily to give the woman shelter and food for that day, and the morrow, which was the Sabbath.

At the rising of the moon Ian left her. She had no speech, but she stammered piteous, ungracious words. Peradventure he understood right well. When he kissed the child, she put her little arms round his neck, and clung to him like a white butterfly against a bole of pine.

As he left the last birches of the Glen of the Willows, and heard the vague, inland rumour of the sea echoing through a gully in the shoreward hills, another wayfarer joined him. It was Art, the son of Mary Gilchrist, he who as a little lad had been found, weary, in that very place, by a stranger who had taken him to a forest booth and shown him the mystery of the Twelve Weavers, who every day of the days meet at the Last Supper—for with them who are immortal there is no last or first.

For a brief while they spoke of one another. Then Ian told Art his friend that his weariness had become a burden too great to be borne; and that, tired of all things—tired of living most of all, tired even of hope—he had come forth to seek the Wells of Peace.

‘And Art,’ he added, ‘if you will tell me where I may find these, you will have all the healing love that is in my heart.’

'There are seven Wells of Peace, Ian Mòr. Four you found long since, blind dreamer; and of one you had the sweet, cool water a brief while ago; and the other is where your hour waits; and the seventh is under the rainbow.'

Ian Mòr turned his eager, weary eyes upon the speaker.

'The Wells of Peace,' he muttered, 'which I have dreamed of—which I have dreamed of through tears and longing, and old, familiar pain, and sorrow too deep for words.'

'Even so, Ian Poet and dreamer, you too have been blind, for all your seeing eyes and wonder-woven brain and passionate dream.'

'Tell me! What are the four Wells of Peace I have already passed and drunken of and not known?'

'They are called "Love," "Beauty," "Dream," and "Endurance."'

Ian bowed his head. Tears dimmed his eyes.

'Art,' he whispered, 'Art, bitter, bitter waters were those that I drank in that fourth Well of Peace. For I knew not the waters were sweet, then. And even now, even now, my heart faints at that shadowy well.'

'It is the Well of Strength, Ian, and its waters rise out of that of Love, which you found so passing sweet.'

'And what is that of which I drank a brief while ago?'

'It was in the Glen of the Willows. You felt its

cool breath when you turned and went back to that poor, outcast woman, and saw her sorrow, and looked into the eyes of the little one. And you drank of it when you gave the woman peace. It is the well where the Son of God sits for ever, dreaming His dream. It is called "Compassion."

And so, Ian thought, he had been at the Well of Peace that is called Compassion, and not known it.

'Tell me, Art, what are the sixth and seventh?'

'The sixth is where your hour waits. It is the Well of Rest; deep, deep sleep; deep, deep rest; balm for the weary brain, the weary heart, the spirit that hath had weariness for comrade and loneliness as a bride. It is a small well that, and shunned of men, for its portals are those of the grave, and the soft breath of it steals up through brown earth and the ancient, dreadful quiet of the underworld.'

'And the seventh? That which is under the rainbow in the West?'

'Ian, you know the old, ancient tales. Once, years ago, I heard you tell that of Ulad the Lonely. Do you remember what was the word on the lips of his dream when, after long years, he saw her again when both met at last under the rainbow?'

'Ay, for sure. It was the word of triumph, of joy, the whisper of peace: "*There is but one love.*"'

'When you hear that, Ian, and from the lips of her whom you have loved and love, then you shall be standing by the Seventh Well.'

They spoke no more, but moved slowly onward through the dusk. The sound of the sea deepened.

The inland breath rose, as on a vast wing, but waned, and passed like perishing smoke against the starry regions in the gulfs above.

When the moon sank behind the ridge-set pines of Benallan, and darkness oozed out of every thicket and shadowy place, and drowned the black-green boughs and branches in a massed obscurity, Ian turned.

His quest was over. Not beyond those crested hills, nor by the running wave on the shore, whose voice filled the night as though it were the dark whorl of a mighty shell: not there, or in this or that far place, were the Wells of Peace.

Love, Beauty, Dream, Endurance, Compassion, Rest, Love-Fulfilled; for sure the Wells of Peace were not far from home.

So Ian Mòr went back to his loneliness and his pain and his longing.

IN THE SHADOW OF THE HILLS

THE people in the Strath said that Ivor M'Iain the shepherd had dwelled overlong among the hills. It may have been so. The wind and the shadows of clouds had become the images of his dreams and of that which was behind his dreams ; and falling water, and the bleating of sheep on the high pastures, and the cries of hawks and ravens, had no other sound or meaning for him than the many sounds that had grown into one silence.

At night, when the sky was clear, he travelled miles across the high, lonely moors. Familiar companionships habited there, but no other: the lapwings wheeled, crying their thin, lamentable cries ; or the grouse made a sudden clamour as they flew low, startled by his wandering feet ; or a wailing rose like passing smoke against the mountain-slopes, voices of the unresting curlews. When the moon hung vast and yellow above the desolate slopes, or low upon the line where the moors crept into the sky, sometimes strange and unfamiliar agitations filled the night. But there were always the hills in their deep silence, the mountain solitudes, the solemn passage of the stars.

He was a shepherd because his father had been a

shepherd: and was content to be a shepherd, because he had little English, and was strangely disquieted when he heard many voices, or the ceaseless, idle noise of familiar things of which those speak much who have the strange, pathetic, infinite dread of silence and of beauty; and because the hills drew him to them.

When the years slipped one upon another, and Ivor M'Iain was no more a young man, but was forty, and already had more grey than brown in his hair, the clan-folk in the glens and along the great Strath wondered why he did not live oftener in the good stone house, with its byres and potato-fields, that had been his father's, and was now his: and why, too, he took no woman to live with him there, for company and for children, if not because of hungry love.

But Ivor M'Iain had already known love, and how great a thing it is, and how small. He had seen the unchanging stars through the hair of her whom he loved, and had seen them veer and become children of the abyss. He was of the few to whom love is not the sweet or bitter accident of life, but is life. A tall, silent man, grey and rugged, fifteen years ago he had been called Imhir Aluinn, Ivor the Handsome; and had been secretly loved by women, and had loved lightly himself, till he came to the one love. Ian Macallum, Peter Macarthur, James Cameron, Rory Macfarlane, the four chief shepherds on the hills north of Sràth-Mòr, respected him, for he had a hill-knowledge greater than any of them, and knew more of old knowledge and old tales, and

had himself in his youth made Gaelic songs that were remembered still—and, too, because, though he would have no dealings with any save the great laird for whom he shepherded, and had but a few words and then silence with drovers and others, and seldom cared to talk long even with them, shepherds though they were, his taciturn kindred of the hills, there was that in him which none could take either for dulness or sullen ill-will. Indeed, it had become a saying in the Strath, ‘As good as the heart of Ivor M’Iain,’ and again, ‘A gentle, sweet way and the kind, deep eyes, just like Ivor the shepherd’s,’ and ‘It’s as true a word as though Ivor M’Iain spoke it.’

But meanwhile the years trampled his youth under foot. Sorrow breathed a grey change upon his hair, and a grey silence into his life; then dwelled with him as his comrade, looking out upon all things, great and small, from his steadfast eyes. This sorrow, that was a grief too intimate to be thought of by him as either grief or sorrow, but had become the colour and sound of life, was because of two things that were both mortal and immortal. The love of the woman in whose little, eager heart he had put his life, as one might with great joy lay the sacrifice on an altar, was one of these; the other was the beauty of her whom he loved, because it was so rare and wonderful in itself, and because it was to him the temporal and visible self of a beauty beyond mortal beauty and of a beauty beyond mortal change.

From the day he loved her he saw a shadow draw

nearer. In some strange, mysterious way life gave again what it took from her. When from too great weakness she could no more go out upon the heather, or stand under the mountain-ash by the brown rushing burn with its birch and fern-shadowed pools, or could no more gather flowers, or watch the wild roses glimmer with falling dew, or the stars gather one by one or in still companies out of dove-grey silences, Ian saw that the beauty of these things, so near and familiar, so remote and beyond all words, so finite alone, so infinite together—as a breath is at once a thing that dies, and is part of the one Breath that is life—had passed into her. There was not anything lost to her of the falling dew, of the loosened fragrances, of the flickering of leaf and fern, of the little radiant lives of flowers, of the still stars; these passed into her, and were a bloom upon her face, and a mystery in her eyes, and a light upon that which was comrade to these momentary breaths, and to that other Breath, wherein these were neither less nor greater than the shining constellations and the ancient, time-forgetting stars.

Great love had brought great sorrows: and it was not the less great because in so large a part inarticulate. In her, he knew the highest. Life could give him no greater joy, if no deeper sorrow. He was grateful. And in his love she, for her part, forgot that youth was for her a flower that had to be relinquished while its bloom was still unfaded, while its fragrance was most sweet: that temporal beauty had dear mortal needs: and that the unfathomable

silences wherein she was soon to sink were a cold bride-bed for desires so limited in hope and so vast in faith.

There are few who love thus. Theirs was that heroic love, not dependent upon those bitter-sweet claims and satieties which sustain lesser dreams; wherein faith was so absolute that neither knew there could be unfaith, and love so deep that neither knew love's feet could stray.

They had great rewards. She left him, herself glad with august sureties, her memory without the least ignoble stain. And he: he had that for which the crowned and the laurelled have bowed their heads in intolerable, sad desire; and was more rich than misers who stare upon idle gold; and lit daily upon a secret altar a flame more great and wonderful than that which shines upon the brows of ancient cities, being more ancient than they.

To many of us these rapt passions are passions that cannot be, or that dwell only in the moonlit realms of the mind. That they should be possible among the humble is a reproach, and therefore belief halts.

But heroic love is not a dream. And though he was only a shepherd, Ivor M'Iain knew this: and when I write of him, I write of one whom I knew, and of what I know.

It was after his supreme loss that he was seen so seldom, and was yet so well loved, and often longed for.

But thereafter he dwelled more and more among the great solitudes, and dreamed dreams that could

not be true for Ivor M'Iain, but could be true for that which passed by that name, and through temporal eyes looked out upon the immortal things of beauty and desire.

Solitary, he tended his sheep day by day and week by week and month by month; and saw moons follow moons, and the sad march of the stars fill the nights, and knew vain, limitless desires; and from winter to spring, and from spring to winter, carried into these silences his patient heart, that little, infinite thing that God appals with the terror of Eternity.

THE DISTANT COUNTRY

'He has loved, perhaps; of a surety he has suffered. Inevitably must he too have heard the "sounds that come from the distant country of Splendour and Terror"; and many an evening has he bowed down in silence before laws that are deeper than the sea.'

THERE is a poet's tale that I love well, and have often recalled; and of how in the hour of death love may be so great that it transcends the height of hills and the waste of deserts and the salt reaches of the sea.

Last night I dreamed of Ithel and Bronwen: confusedly, for a noise of waves and the crying of an inland bird were continuously wrought into the colours and fragrances of places remote from moor and sea, with the colours and fragrances of a land of orchards and pastures and quiet meres, and with the thin, poignant fragrances and acute breadths of colour of the sun-wrought East.

And when I woke, I knew it was not really Ithel and Bronwen, Red Ithel and Pale Bronwen, of whom I had been dreaming. Nor yet of an antique day, nor of the remote East, but of two, whom I knew well, and of this West of rains and rainbows, of tears and hopes, which I love as a child loves a widowed mother.

Then I slept again, and before dawn dreamed, and again awoke. But it was not of Bronwen and Ithel now that I dreamed, but of Aillinn and Bailê the Sweet-Spoken.

Among the stories of the Gael there is one that women love most. It is that of Bailê the Sweet-Spoken. When Bailê, who lived in one part of Gaeldom, suffered in any wise, Aillinn, who lived in another part, suffered also and with the same suffering. So great was their love that distance between them was no more than a flow of water between two other flows in a narrow stream. That is love, that cannot live apart. But in an evil hour the hate of a base nature caused a death-image to appear to Aillinn and to Bailê Honeymouth. And when Bailê the Sweet-Spoken saw his dead love, his heart broke, and the grass was less cold than was that which lay upon it. And when Aillinn saw her dead love, her life went away in a breath, and she was more white than were the white daisies in the grass where her great beauty lay like a stilled, motionless flame. Each was buried where each fell. Then this wonder was known throughout Gaeldom, that an apple-tree straightway grew out of the grave of Aillinn, which the wind and the sun and moon and unseen powers moulded at the top into the form and head of Bailê; and that out of the grave of Bailê grew a yew-tree, of the upper leaves and branches of which the unseen powers and the moon and the sun and the wind wrought the fair, beautiful head of Aillinn. That is love, that cannot dream apart. That is love,

that for ever remoulds love nearer and nearer to the desire of the heart.

And when seven years had passed, the yew-tree and the apple-tree were laid low. It may be that one who loved not with the great love bade this to be done: for it is only the few who love as Aillinn and Bailc loved, and the smaller or weaker the soul is, the more does it abhor or be troubled by the white flame. But the poets and seers made tablets of the apple-wood and the yew-wood, and wrote thereon amorous and beautiful words. Later, it happened that the Ardree summoned the poets to bring these tablets before him at the House of the Kings. But hardly had he touched them when the yew-wood and the apple-wood were suddenly one wood, swift in their coming together as when two waves meet at sea and are one wave. And the king and those about him could see the pale apple-wood inwoven with the dark yew-wood, nor could any magic or incantation undo that miracle. So the Ardree bade the wood of the love of Aillinn and Bailc be taken to the treasury, and be kept there with the sacred emblems of great powers and demons and gods and the trophies of the heroes. And that is love, that heeds neither the word of man, nor the bitterness of death, nor the open law, nor the law that is secret and inscrutable.

But when I heard a mavis singing above the dew on the white wild-roses, and saw the blue light like a moving blue flame underslidden with running gold, and knew that it was day, I thought no more of

Aillinn and of Bailé the Sweet-Spoken, nor of Red Ithel and Pale Bronwen, nor of the far, dim East where Ithel lay among the sands and Bronwen's love flickered like a shadow ; nor of the remote far-off day of those four lovers of dream ; but of two whom I loved well and who had their day in this West of rains and rainbows, of tears and hopes.

Love is at once so great and so frail that there is perhaps no thought which can at the same time so appal and uplift us. And there is in love, at times, for some, an unfathomed mystery. That which can lead to the stars can lead to the abyss. There is a limit set to mortal joy as well as to mortal suffering, and the flame may overleap itself in one as in the other. The most dread mystery of a love that is overwhelming is its death through its own flame.

This is an 'untold story' that I write. None could write it. A few will understand : to most it will be at once as real and as unreal as foam, as no more than the phosphorescence of emotion. One may see, and yet deny : as one may see in the nocturnal wave a flame that is not there, or a star caught momentarily in the travelling hollow, and know that there is no flame but only a sudden gleam of infinitesimal, congregated life ; no star, but only a wandering image. But, also, one may deny that which is not phantasmal. He who is colour-blind cannot see colour : he who is blind to that little infinite flame of life which creates the blue mist of youth and love and romance cannot discern in youth or love or

romance the names of those primitive ecstasies that in themselves are immortal things, though we see only their fruitions and decays: and he whose soul is obscure, or whose spirit is blind, cannot see those things which pertain to the spirit, or understand those things wherein the spirit expresses itself.

But for the some who care, I write these few words: not because I know a mystery, and would reveal it, but because I have known a mystery, and am to-day as a child before it, and can neither reveal nor interpret it.

They loved each other well, the two of whom I speak. It was no lesser love, though upheld by desires and fed with flame; but knew these, and recognised in them the bodily images of a flame that was not mortal and of desires that were not finite. They knew all of joy and sorrow that can come to man and woman through the mysterious gates of Love, which to some seem of dusk and to some seem of morning or the radiances of noon.

Year by year their love deepened. I know of no love like theirs. It was in truth, a flame.

One hears everywhere that passion is but unsatisfied desire, that love is but a fever. So, too, as I have heard, the moles, which can see in twilight and amid the earthy glooms they inhabit, cannot see the stars even as shining points upon the branches of trees, nor these moving branches even, nor their wind-lifted shadows.

Their love did not diminish, but grew, through tragic circumstance. As endurance became harder,—

for love deepened and passion became as the bird of prey that God sets famished in the wilderness, while the little and great things of common life came in upon this love like a tide,—it seemed to each that they only withdrew the more into that which was for them not the most great thing in life, but life.

To her, he was not only the man she loved : to whom she had given the inward, unnameable life as well as that which dwelled in the heart and in the mind, in the pulse and the blood and the nerves. He was Love itself ; and when sometimes he whispered in her hair, she heard other words, and knew that a greater than he whom she loved spoke with hidden meanings.

How could she tell what she was to him ? She was a flame to his mind as well as to his life : that she knew. But he could not tell her what words fail to tell. She could feel his heart beat : his pulse rose to her eyes as a wave to the moon : in those eyes of his she could see that which was in her own heart, but which she had to blind and lead blindfold, because a woman cannot look upon that which is intolerable. Doubtless it was not so with him. This she could not know. But she knew her own heart. The untranslatable call was there. She heard it in those silences where women listen.

Sometimes she looked at him, wondering : at times, even with a sudden, mysterious fear. She did not fear him whom she loved, but unknown forces behind him. He spoke to her sometimes of that which cannot pass : of love more enduring than the granite

hills, of passion, of the spirit, of deathless things. She feared them. She did not fear with the mind: that leaped, as a doe to the water-springs. She did not fear with the body, for that abhorred death and the ending of dreams. But something within her feared. These things he spoke of were too great and terrible a wind for a little, wandering flame.

Did he not think thus himself? she wondered. Was it because he was a man that he spoke blithely of these far-off, beautiful and terrible things?

Once they were lying on a grassy slope, on a promontory, on a warm, moonlit night. A single pine-tree grew on the little, rocky buttress: and against this they leaned, and looked through the branches at the pale, uncertain stars, or into the moving, dark, mysterious water.

'It is our love,' he whispered to her: 'we are on the granite rock: and through the tree of our little world we look at the unchanging stars: and this moving tide is the mystery that is for ever about us, and whispers so much, and tells so little.'

It was sweet to hear and she loved him who whispered: and the thought was her own. But that night she lay thinking for hour upon hour, or, rather, her mind was but a swimming thought; a thought that swam idly on still seas in deep darkness. How wonderful were these dreams that love whispered: how . . .

But when at sunrise she woke, it was with a sense that the horizons of life crept closer and closer. She smiled sadly as she thought of how measurable are

the mortalities we flatter with infinitude: the sands of the desert, the green hair of the grass, the waves of the sea.

Often, of late, she knew that he who loved her was strangely disquieted. 'Too many dreams,' he said once, with double meaning, smiling as he looked at her, but with an unexpressed trouble in his eyes.

More and more, because of the great, enduring, pitiless flame of love, she turned to the little things of the hour and the moment. It is the woman's way, and is a law. And more and more, wrought by longings and desires, he whom she loved turned to the inward contemplation of the things that are immortal, to the longings and desires that have their roots in the soul, but whose tendrils reach beyond the stars, and whose flowers grow by the waters of life in Edens beyond dream. It may not be men's way; and he had the fatal gift of the imagination, which is to men what great beauty is to women—a crown of stars and a slaying sword.

They turned the same way, not knowing it. How could they know, being blind? Blind children they were.

He feared the flame would consume them. She feared it would consume itself.

Therein lay the bitterness. But for her, being a woman, the depths were deeper. He had his dreams.

When, at last, the end came—a strange, a tragic, an almost incredible end, perhaps, for love did not

veer, and passion was not slain, but translated to a starry dream, and every sweet and lovely intercourse was theirs still—the suffering was too great to be borne. Yet neither death nor tragic mischance came with veiled healing.

Love, won at a supreme hazard (and again, I do not tell the story of these two, who had, and now in the further silences have, their own secret, for ever sacred), proved a stronger force than life. Life that can be measured, that is so measurable, is as a child before the other unknown power, that is without measure. The man did not understand. He fed the flame with dreams upon dreams, with hopes upon hopes; with more dreams and more hopes.

Once, dimly foreseeing the end, she said, 'Love can be slain. It is mortal.' He answered, almost with anger, that sooner could the soul die. She looked at him, wondering that he, whose imagination was so much greater than hers, could not understand.

She loved to the edge of death by will. Will can control the mortal things of love. Instinct wore her heart by day and by night. She put her frail strength into the balance, then her dreams, then her memories. Before the end, hesitating, but not for herself, she put her whole mind there. Still, life weighed lower and lower the scale.

One day they talked of immaterial things. Suddenly he asked her a question.

She was silent. The room was in darkness, for the fire had burned low. He could see only the

ruddy gleam on the white skirt; the two white hands; the little restless flame in an opal.

Then, quietly, she told him. She had not ceased to love: it was not that.

Simply, love had been too great a flame. At the last, at that moment, she had striven to save all: she had already put all in the balance, all but her soul. That, too, she had now put there with swift and terrible suddenness.

The balance trembled, then Life weighed the scale lower, and lower.

It was gone. That had gone away upon the wind, which was light as it, homeless as it, as mysterious. Out of the balance she took back what else she had put there: her mind, quiet, sane, serene now, if that can be serene that neither fears nor cares because it does not feel: and the dreams, and desires, that had turned to loosened fragrances and shadows: and hopes, grey as the ashes of wood, that fell away and were no more.

She was the same, and yet not the same. He trembled, but dare not understand. In his mind were falling stars.

'I will give you all I have to give,' she said; 'to you, who have had all I had to give, I give that which is left. It is an image that has no life.'

When he walked that night alone under the stars he understood. Love can come, not in his mortal but in his immortal guise: as a spirit of flame. There is no alchemy of life which can change that tameless and fierce thing, that power more intense

than fire, that creature whose breath consumes what death only silences.*

It had come close and looked at them. Long ago he had prayed that it might be so. In answer, the immortal had come to the mortal. How little of all that was to be he had foreseen when, by a spiritual force, he accomplished that too intimate, that too close union, in which none may endure! I speak of a mystery. That it may be, that to many, if not all, this thing that I say will be meaningless, I know. But I do not try to explain what is not a matter of words: nay, I could not, for though I believe, I know of this mystery only through those two who broke (or of whom one broke) some occult but imperious spiritual law.

They lived long after this great change. Their love never faltered. Each, as before, came close to the other, as day and night ceaselessly meet in dawns and twilights.

But that came to her no more which had gone. For him, he grew slowly to understand a love more great than his. His had not known the innermost flame, that is pure fire.

Strange and terrible thoughts came to him at times. The waste places of the imagination were peopled.

Often, as he has told me, through sleepless nights a solemn marching as of a vast throng rose and fell, a dreadful pulse. But, for him, life was fulfilled. I know that he had always one changeless dream, a hope, a faith. I do not know what, in the end,

clouded or unclouded that faithful spirit. But I, too, who knew them, who loved them, have my assured faith: the more, not the less, now that they are gone to that 'distant country of Splendour and Terror.' Love is more great than we conceive, and Death is the keeper of unknown redemptions. Of her, I have had often, I have ever, in my mind the words wherewith I begin one of the tales in this book: 'It is God that builds the nest of the blind bird.'

A MEMORY OF BEAUTY

'Cover her face ; mine eyes dazzle ; she died young.'

WEBSTER.

MANY years ago a beautiful dark woman came to Ardnathonn, and lived there a while, and died, as she had lived, in silence.

None in that remote place knew who she was ; nor of any there was ever known the name of the man who loved her, and died, or the name of another man who loved her, and died.

They called her 'the foreign woman' ; and where the nettle sheds her snow above the lichened stones in the little seaward-sloping graveyard, there appear on one stone these words only : *The Stranger*.

In the ruined garden of Tighnarnathonn stands a broken sundial. Here may still be deciphered the legend : *Time Past : Time to Come*.

Time past, time to come. It is the refrain of our mortality.

And Aileen ? . . . That great beauty of hers is no more. It is unthinkable. If loveliness can pass away as a breath . . . nay, did not one in Asia of old, one of the seers of the world, interpret thus : 'I am Beauty itself among beautiful things.' The

dream that is the body eternally perishes; only the dream that is the soul endures.

Of the two men who loved Aileen, there is no more than this to be said. One, he who had his days with her, had the greater peace, the happier life. The other . . . he wrote this song—

‘Aileen, Aileen, heart of my life, my pulse, my flame,
There are two men loving thee, and two who are calling thee
wife :

A name is a name, but Love is love, Aileen my Queen !
True art thou, dear, true and strong, in life and in death.

Thou to me, I to thee, this is the wonder, the joy :
This is our breath of life : that I am for thee, and thou for me !’

Can it be that all three are dead? There are times when I look for the coming of two at least, as the stranded seaweed for the sea. When the love of men is as the idle wind, and the loveliness that was woman is less than dust, the word alone does not perish. This is my solace, my hope.

It is a commonplace that death is held most mournful when it is the seal of silence upon youth, upon what is beautiful. Peradventure, life incomplete may some day be revealed to us as the sole life that is complete. Howbeit, we need not lament when love has been gloriously present. I think often of that old sundial inscription—

‘Light and Shade by turns,
But Love always . . .’

To have loved supremely! After all, the green, sweet world had been good to her, its daughter.

She had loved and been loved, with the passion of passion. Nothing in the world could take away that joy ; not any loss or sorrow, nor that last grief, the death of him whom she so loved ; not the mysterious powers themselves that men call God, and that move and live and have their blind will behind the blowing wind and the rising sap, behind the drifting leaf and the granite hills, behind the womb of woman and the mind of man, behind the miracle of day and night, behind life, behind death.

This was hers. She had this supreme heritage. In truth she was crowned. And he . . . from the first he wore the glory of her love, as morning wears the sunrise. It is enough.

Both now are alien far hence, in a land unvisited of us. I think I know that when she died, alone, and in a strange place, with unrelinquished name, and leaving only a memory of beauty, she heard the voice of him whom she loved with the one love.

Can love itself be as an idle bow upon our poor perishing heavens? Is love a dream, a dream within a dream? If so, the soul herself were a vain image, as fleeting as the travelling shadow of a wave.

Alas, how brief that lovely hour which was her life! It is only in what is loveliest, most fugitive, that eternity reveals, as in a sudden flame, as in the vanishing facet of a second, the beauty of all beauty ; that it whispers, in the purple hollow of the dancing flame, the incommunicable word.

Strange mystery, that so many ages had to come

and go, so many lives to be lived, so many ecstasies and raptures and sorrows and vicissitudes to flame and be and pass, just to produce one frail flower of perfection. I sometimes think of this unknown loveliness, this woman whose sole pulse now is in the sap of the grass over her head, not as a mortal joy, but as the breath or symbol of a most ancient and ever new mystery, the mystery of eternal beauty :

‘ . . . For I have seen
In lonely places, and in lonelier hours,
My vision of the rainbow aureoled face
Of her whose mean name Beauty : proud, austere :
Dim vision of the flawless, perfect face,
Divinely fugitive, that haunts the world,
And lifts man’s spiral thought to lovelier dreams.’

She is gone now who was so fair. Can great beauty perish? The unlovely is as the weed that is everywhere under the sun. But that wind which blows the seed, alike of the unlovely and of the children of beauty—can it have failed to wed that exhaled essence to the glory of light, so that somewhere, somehow, that which was so beautiful is?

I hold to this.

‘ There was darkness over Eirí: they adored things of Faerie.’

The Fiacc Hymn.

THE SAD QUEEN

Two men lay bound in the stone fold behind the great wall of Dun Scaith in the Isle of Mist.

One was Ulric the Skald ; the other was Connla the Harper. Only they two lived when the galleys went down in the Minch, and the Gael and the Gall sank in the reddened waves.

For a long hour they were swung on the waves and on the same spar—the mast of the *Death-Raven*, which Svén of the Long Hair had sailed in from the north isles, with a score galleys of a score men in each. Farcha the Silent had met him with two score galleys of ten men in each.

They had fought since the sun was in the south till it hung above the west. Then there were only the *Death-Raven* and the *Foam-Sweeper*. Ulric sat by Svén and sang the death-song and the song of swords ; Connla sat by Farcha and sang the high song of victory.

When the galleys met through the bloody tangle in the seas, where spears rose and fell like boughs and branches of a wood in storm, and where men's hair clung black and limp past wild eyes and faces red with blood, Svén leaped into the *Foam-Sweeper*, and clove the head from a spearman who thrust at

him, so that it fell into the sea, and the headless man shook with a palsy and waveringly mowed an idle spear.

But in that doing he staggered, and Farcha thrust his spear through him. The spear fixed Svén to the mast. Then an arrow from the sea struck him across the eyes, and he saw no more ; and when the *Foam-Sweeper* sank and dragged the *Death-Raven* with it, the two kings met : but Farcha was now like a heavy fish swung this way and that, and Svén thought the body was the body of Gunhild whom he loved, and strove to kiss it, but could not because of the spear and seven arrows which nailed him to the mast.

When the moon rose, the waters were in a white calm. Mid-sea, a great shadow passed northward : the travelling myriad of the herring-host.

When Ulric the Skald sank from the mast, Connla the Harper held him by the hair, and gave him breath, so that he lived.

Thus when two spears drifted near, neither snatched at them. Later, Connla spoke. 'One pulls me by the feet,' he said ; 'it is one of your dead men who is drowning me.' But at that Ulric drew a long breath, and strengthened his heart : then, seizing one of the spears, he thrust it downward, and struck the dead man whose hair tangled the feet of Connla, so that the dead man sank.

When they heard cries, they thought the galleys had come again, or others of Svén's host, or of Farcha's : but when they were dragged out of the

sea, and lay staring at the stars, they knew no more; for sounds swam into their ears, and mist came into their eyes, and it was as though they sank through the boat, and through the sea, and through the infinite blank void below the sea, and were as two feathers there, blown idly under pale forlorn stars.

When they woke it was day, and a woman stood looking darkly at them.

She was tall, and of great strength; taller than Connla, stronger than Ulric. Long black hair fell upon her shoulders, which, with her breast and thighs, were covered with pale bronze. A red and green cloak was over the right shoulder, and was held by a great brooch of gold. A yellow torque of gold was round her neck. A three-pointed torque of gold was on her head. Her legs were swathed with deerskin thongs, and her feet were in coverings of cowskin stained red.

Her face was pale as wax, and of a strange and terrible beauty. They could not look long in her eyes, which were black as darkness, with a red flame wandering in it. Her lips were curled delicately, and were like thin sudden lines of blood in the still whiteness of her face.

'I am Scathach,' she said, when she had looked long at them. Each knew that name, and the heart of each was like a bird before the slinger. If they were with Scathach,¹ the queen of the warrior-women

¹ Scathach (pronounced *Ska'ah*, or *Skiah*): the name of the island of Skye is by some said to be derived from the famous Amazonian queen who lived there, and taught Cuchullin the arts of war.

of the Isle of Mist, it would have been better to die in the water. The grey stones of Dun Scaith were russet with old blood of slain captives.

'I am Scathach,' she said. 'Do I look upon Svén of Lochlann and Farcha of the Middle Isles?'

'I am Ulric the Skald,' answered the northman.

'I am Connla the Harper,' answered the Gael.

'You die to-night,' and with that Scathach stood silent again, and looked darkly upon them for a long while.

At noon a woman brought them milk and roasted elk meat. She was fair to see, though a scar ran across her face. They sent word by her to Scathach with a prayer for life; they would be helots, and put birth upon women. For they knew the wont. But the woman returned with the same word.

'It is because she loved Cuchullin,' the woman said, 'and he was a poet, and sang songs, and made music as you do. He was fairer than you, man with the yellow hair, man with the long, dark hair; and you have put memories into the mind of Scathach. But she will listen to you harping and singing before you die.'

When the darkness came, and the dew fell, Ulric spoke to Connla. 'The horse Rime-mane is moving among the stars, for the foam is falling from his mouth.'

Connla felt the falling of the dew.

'It was thus on the night I loved,' he said below his breath.

Ulric could not see Connla's face because of the

shadows. But he heard low sobs, and knew that Connla's face was wet with tears. 'I too loved,' he said; 'I have had many women for my love.'

'There is but one love,' answered Connla in a low voice; 'it is of that I am thinking and have remembrance.'

'Of that I do not know,' said Ulric. 'I loved one woman well so long as she was young and fair. But one day a king's son desired her, and I came upon them in a wood on a cliff by the sea. I put my arms about her and leaped down the cliff. She was drowned. I paid no eric.'

'There is no age upon the love of my love,' said Connla softly: 'she was more beautiful than the stars.' And because of that great beauty he forgot death and his bonds, and knew august and beautiful dreams.

When the warrior-women led them out to the shore, Scathach looked at them from where she sat by the great fire that blazed upon the sands.

She had been told that which they said one to the other.

'Sing the song of your love,' she said to Ulric.

'What heed have I of any woman in the hour of my death?' he answered sullenly.

'Sing the song of your love,' she said to Connla.

Connla looked at her, and at the great fire round which the fierce-eyed women stood and looked at him, and at the still, breathless stars. The dew fell upon him. *

Then he sang—

‘Is it time to let the hour rise and go forth, as a hound loosed from the battle-cars?

Is it time to let the hour go forth, as the White Hound with the eyes of flame?

For if it be not time, I would have this hour that is left to me under the stars,

Wherein I may dream my dream again, and at the last whisper one name.

It is the name of one who was more fair than youth to the old, than life to the young;

She was more fair than the first love of Angus the Beautiful, and though I were blind

And deaf for a hundred ages I would see her, more fair than any poet has sung,

And hear her voice like mournful bells crying on the wind.’

There was silence. Scathach sat with her face between her hands, staring into the flame.

She did not lift her face when she spoke.

‘Take Ulric the Skald,’ she said at last, but with eyes that stared still into the flame, ‘and give him to what woman wants him, for he knows nothing of love. If no woman wants him, put a spear through his heart, so that he die easily.

‘But take Connla the Harper, because he has known all things, knowing that little infinite thing, and has no more to know, and is beyond us, and lay him upon the sand with his face to the stars, and put red brands of fire upon his naked breast, till his heart bursts and he dies.’

So Connla the Harper died in silence, where he lay on the moonlit sand, with red embers and flaming brands on his naked breast, and his face white and still as the stars that shone upon him.

THE WOMAN WITH THE NET

WHEN Artân had kissed the brow of every white-robed brother on Iona, and had been thrice kissed by the aged Colum, his heart was filled with gladness.

It was late summer, and in the afternoon light peace lay on the green waters of the Sound, on the green grass of the dunes, on the white and brown domed cells of the Culdees over whom the holy Colum ruled, and on the little rock-strewn hill which rose above where stood Colum's wattled church of sun-baked mud.

The abbot walked slowly by the side of the young man. Colum was tall, with hair long and heavy but white as the canna, and with a beard that hung low on his breast, grey as the moss on old firs. His blue eyes were tender. The youth—for though he was a grown man he seemed a youth beside Colum—had beauty. He was tall and comely, with yellow curling hair, and dark-blue eyes, and a skin so white that it troubled some of the monks who dreamed old dreams and washed them away in tears and scourgings.

'You have the bitter fever of youth upon you,

Artân,' said Colum, as they crossed the dunes beyond Dun-I; 'but you have no fear, and you will be a flame among these Pictish idolaters, and you will be a lamp to show them the way.'

'And when I come again, there will be clappings of hands, and hymns, and many rejoicings?'

'I do not think you will come again,' said Colum. 'The wild folk of these northlands will burn you, or crucify you, or put you upon the crahslat, or give you thirst and hunger till you die. It will be a great joy for you to die like that, Artân, my son?'

'Ay, a great joy,' answered the young monk, but with his eyes dreaming away from his words.

There was silence between them as they neared the cove where a large coracle lay, with three men in it.

'Will God be coming to Iona when I am away?' asked Artân.

Colum stared at him.

'Is it likely that God would come here in a coracle?' he asked, with scornful eyes.

The young man looked abashed. For sure, God would not come in a coracle, just as he himself might come. He knew by that how Colum had reproved him. He would come in a cloud of fire, and would be seen from far and near. Artân wondered if the place he was going to was too far north for him to see that greatness; but he feared to ask.

'Give me a new name,' he asked; 'give me a new name, my Father.'

‘What name will you have?’

‘Servant of Mary.’

‘So be it, Artân Gille-Mhoire.’

With that Colum kissed him and bade farewell, and Artân sat down in the coracle, and covered his head with his mantle, and wept and prayed.

The last word he heard was, *Peace!*

‘That is a good word, and a good thing,’ he said to himself; ‘and because I am the Servant of Mary, and the Brother of Jesu the Son, I will take peace to the *Cruitnè*, who know nothing of that blessing of the blessings.’

When he unfolded his mantle, the coracle was already far from Iona. The south wind blew, and the tides swept northward, and the boat moved swiftly across the water. The sea was ashine with froth and small waves leaping like lambs.

In the boat were Thorkeld, a helot of Iona, and two dark wild-eyed men of the north. They were Picts, but could speak the tongue of the Gael. Myrdu, the Pictish king of Skye, had sent them to Iona, to bring back from Colum a culdee who could show wonders.

‘And tell the Chief Druid of the God-men,’ Myrdu had said, ‘that if his culdee does not show me good wonders, and make me believe in his two gods and the woman, I will put an ash-shaft through his body from his hips and out at his mouth, and send him back on the north-tide to the Isle of the White-Robes.’

The sun was lying among the outer isles when the coracle passed near the Isle of the Columns. A great noise was in the air : the noise of the waves in the caverns, and the noise of the tide, like sea-wolves growling, and like bulls bellowing in a narrow pass of the hills.

A sudden current caught the boat, and it began to drift towards great reefs white with ceaseless torn streams.

Thorkeld leaned from the helm, and shouted to the two Picts. They did not stir, but sat staring, idle with fear.

Artân knew now that it was as Colum had said. God would give him glory soon.

So he took the little clàrsach he had for hymns, for he was the best harper on Iona, and struck the strings, and sang. But the Latin words tangled in his throat, and he knew too that the men in the boat would not understand what he sang ; also that the older gods still came far south, and in the caves of the Isle of Columns were demons. There was only one tongue common to all ; and since God had wisdom beyond that of Colum himself, He would know the song in Gaelic as well as the song in Latin.

So Artân let the wind take his broken hymn, and he made a song of his own, and sang—

‘ O Heavenly Mary, Queen of the Elements,
And you, Brigit the fair, with the little harp,
And all the saints, and all the old gods,
Speak to the Father, that He may save us from drowning.’

Then, seeing that the boat drifted closer, he sang again—

‘Save us from the rocks and the sea, Queen of Heaven !
And remember that I am a culdee of Iona,
And that Colum has sent me to the *Cruitne*
To sing them the song of peace lest they be damned for ever !’

Thorkeld laughed at that.

‘Can the woman put swimming upon you?’ he said roughly. ‘I would rather have the good fin of a great fish now than any woman in the skies.’

‘You will burn in hell for that,’ said Artân, the holy zeal warm at his heart.

But Thorkeld answered nothing. His hand was on the helm, his eyes on the foaming rocks. Besides, what had he to do with the culdee’s hell or heaven? When he died, he, who was a man of Lochlann, would go to his own place.

One of the dark men stood, holding the mast. His eyes shone. Thick words swung from his lips, like seaweed thrown out of a hollow by an ebbing wave.

The coracle swerved, and the four men were wet with the heavy spray.

Thorkeld put his oar in the water, and the swaying craft righted.

‘Glory to God !’ said Artân.

‘There is no glory to your god in this,’ said Thorkeld scornfully. ‘Did you not hear what Necta sang? He sang to the woman in there that drags men into the caves, and throws their bones on the next tide. He put an incantation upon her,

and she shrank, and the boat slid away from the rocks.'

'That is a true thing,' thought Artân. He wondered if it was because he had not sung his hymn in the holy Latin.

When the last flame died out of the west, and the stars came like sheep gathering at the call of the shepherd, Artân remembered that he had not said the prayers and sung the Vesper hymn.

He lay back and listened. There were no bells calling across the water. He looked into the depths. It was Manann's kingdom, and he had never heard that God was there; but he looked. Then he stared into the dark-blue, star-strewn sky.

Suddenly he touched Thorkeld.

'Tell me,' he said, 'how far north has the Cross of Christ come?'

'By the sea way it has not come here yet. Murdoch the Freckled came with it this way, but he was pulled into the sea, and he died.'

'Who pulled him into the sea?'

Thorkeld stared into the running wave. He had no words.

Artân lay still a long while.

'It will go ill with me,' he thought, 'if Mary cannot see me so far away from Iona, and if God will not listen to me. Colum should have known that, and given me a holy leaf with the fair branching letters on it, and the Latin words that are the words of God.'

Then he spoke to the man who had sung.

'Who is the Woman with the Net,' he said, 'of whom you sang?'

Necta turned his head away.

'I said it when I sang,' he said sullenly.

'Tell me.'

'She? She is the Woman who stands on the banks of the river.'

'What river?'

'I do not know the name of the river.'

'Is it north?'

'I do not know. It is the great river. The banks have mist and shadow. She has a great net. And when she nets men they are dead. She takes them out of the net, and some she throws into a caldron in the rocks, filled with green flame, and some she puts beneath her feet and tramples into dust. That is how the sand is made.'

Artân shivered with the thought that leaped in his mind. All those white sands of Iona . . . were they fair beautiful women trampled into white sand by the feet of the Woman with the Net?

'What of those in the caldron?' he asked.

'They are thrown out on the wind. They pass into trees and grass and reeds, and deer and wolves, and men and women.'

'Where?'

The man stared idly.

'There are three there,' he said, 'who watch the Woman with the Net. One sits on a great stone and is blind; one whirls a flaming sword; one stands and leans on a great spear.'

'Who are these three?' asked Artân.

The man stared idly.

'There is fire on the ground below that sword. There is blood on the ground below that spear. The man with the sword puts it into the blackness of the shadow that is about the great stone, but he does not know what is there. The man with the spear puts it into the blackness about the great stone, but he does not know what is there. The blind man on the stone has his feet in the blackness of the shadow, but he does not know what is there.'

'It will be Mary,' said Artân, brooding deep; 'it will be Mary, and God, and the Son, and the Spirit.'

But Necta the Pict stared at him.

'What have these ancient ones to do with your Iona gods, White-Robe?'

Artân frowned.

'The curse of the God of Peace upon you for that,' he said angrily: 'do you not know that you have hell for your dwelling-place if you speak evil of God the Father, and the Son, and the Mother of God?'

'How long have they been in Iona, White-Robe?'

The man spoke scornfully. Artân knew they had not been there many years. He had no words.

'My fathers worshipped the Sun on the Holy Isle before ever your great Druid that is called Colum crossed the Moyle. Were your three gods in the coracle with Colum? They were not on the Holy Isle when he came.'

'They were coming there,' answered Artân con-

fusedly. 'It is a long long way from . . . from . . . from the place they were sailing from.'

Necta listened sullenly.

'Let them stay on Iona,' he said: 'gods though they be, it would fare ill with them if they came upon the Woman with the Net.' Then he turned on his side, and lay by the man Darach, who was staring at the moon and muttering words that neither Artân nor Thorkeld knew.

For a time the culdee and the helot spoke in low voices. Thorkeld spoke of his gods. Then he laughed when he spoke of the women-haters, as he called the holy men of Iona. Artân said nothing. Why should he hate women, he thought? They were very fair, he remembered, and made the heart beat.

Thorkeld smiled. He spoke of women. Artân heard a song in the sea. The stars shone like fires in a haven. He put his hand in the water, and put that water against his dry lips. The salt stung him.

Thorkeld slept. A white calm had fallen. The boat lay like a shell on a silent pool. There was nothing between that dim wilderness and the vast sweeping blackness filled with quivering stars, but the coracle, that a wave could crush.

Artân could not sleep; it was easier to forget God, and the Son, and the Spirit, than those white women of whom Thorkeld had spoken. He felt hands touch him, white and warm. A fever was in his blood.

Then he slept, and dreamed that he was on a misty

bank by a great river. The river was salt, and moans and cries filled the lamentable rushing noise.

A great fear came upon him. He drew back, and something came out of the darkness and swept past him. The cold air of it made him stagger and shiver. He put his hands to a bush, and they went through it, and he fell. There was a spear on the ground. He put his hand on it, and it was dust.

Then he rose and cried—

‘O Mary, Mother of God, Queen of the Elements,
Have mercy upon Artân the Culdee!
For it is a good deed I do coming here to the heathen,
And Colum will tell you that, Colum of Iona!’

But something swept again out of the darkness, and Artân was caught in a net, and was swung across the river. And in that net there were fish beyond count, and all were men and women, and all were dead, and were calling upon many gods.

Then he saw a white face in the dusk. Great stars shone in the hair about the brows; bats flew in the hollow caverns of the eyes; and a hand, grey-white as clay, plucked at the mass that was in the net. Some were thrown out, and were trampled into dust, and a wind blew the dust into the river, and the grains were borne to the lips of all isles and shores, and were idle sand thenceforth. And some were plucked by the hand, and were thrown into the great caldron of green fire. Artân was of these. And as he swam hither and thither in that immortal water that was as green fire, he saw the Blind Man

on the Stone, and the Man who whirled a flaming Sword, and the Man with the Spear.

The Man with the Sword cleaved him in two parts, and Artân swam as two swim, but knew not the one part from the other, or which he was. Then the Man with the Spear drove the spear through the two parts as they swam, and they were made one. And Artân's heart shook with wonder, for in that same moment, as it seemed, he was in a dim wood, and stood by a tree, and by another tree was a woman, like a flame of pale green, and more beautiful than his dreams. He heard the wind in the grass, and saw a star among dark branches, and in the moonshine a bird sang. The woman threw a white flower at his feet, and he gave a cry, and her breast warmed his breast, and her breath was as flame, and all his youth was upon him again, and Colum was far away, and the Others were not there in that place.

Then Artân woke, and saw the cold shine of the stars, and heard the dawn-wind on the sea. To the east, the mountain-peaks of Skye rose dark, but pale light travelled along their summits. It was day.

For three years Artân dwelt among the Picts. He was called the Dart-Thrower because of his skill in war. He had to wife Oona, the daughter of Myrdu the king, and three women loved him and were held by him. But Oona only he loved. He knew no Latin words now; but once the sea-rovers brought a coracle with three culdees in it, and he heard one singing the old words as he died slowly on

the tall tree where he was crucified. For one was blinded and led naked into the woods; and one was thrust through with an ash-shaft, from the hips to the mouth, and thrown upon the tide; and one was tied to a sapling, and was crucified upon a tall tree.

'I have no Latin now,' said Artân to the monk, 'but tell me this: Are God and the Son and the Spirit still upon Iona?'

The monk cursed him and died.

That curse went out, and lay upon Oona, and she withered, and lay down, and life went from her.

Artân took a great galley that held a score men. He set sail for Iona.

But God was now come further north than Iona; for between the Holy Isle and the Isle of the Columns the boat filled and sank.

Colum beheld this in a vision, and in a hymn praised God. Artân alone did not drown, but swam on a spar, and was washed on to the sands at Iona.

The Culdees took him.

'In the name of God,' said Colum, with fierce anger in his eyes: 'in the name of God, put Artân, the Servant of Mary, into the cell below the ground; and let him rest and pray there through the night; and at dawn we shall take him out upon the shore, and shall drive a stake through his breast, and the demon that is within him shall go out of him, and he himself shall go to God the Father. For he has had the holy water on him, and is of those who dwell with the saints.'

For Colum knew all that Artân had done.

So Artân the Culdee lay in darkness that night.
And before dawn he made this song—

‘It is but a little thing to sit here in the silence and the
dark;
For I remember the blazing noon when I saw Oona the
White.
I remember the day when we sailed the Moyle in our skin-
built bark,
And I remember Oona’s lips on mine in the heart of the
night.

So it is a little thing to sit here, hearing nought, seeing
nought:
When the dawn breaks they will hurry me hence to the new-
dug grave:
It will be quiet there, if it be true what the good Colum has
taught,
And I shall hear Oona’s voice as a sleeping seal hears the
moving wave.’

ENYA OF THE DARK EYES

ON the day when Firbis of the Seven Dûns, called Firbis the White, from the long white hair which fell upon his shoulders, and also because of his pale face, pale as a leper's, with scarlet lips, told Cathba, the son of Cathba Mòr, that he might have his daughter to wife, Enya of the Dark Eyes was not to be found.

At first Firbis laughed. Then when he saw Cathba frowning and muttering, he waxed wroth, and bade a search be made for the girl.

It was Culain of the Trails who found her. She was in the depth of the great forest beyond Dùn-Fhirbis, and was with Aodh the Singer. No man in that region knew who Aodh was, save that he was a hillman out of the north. This was because he was under *geas* to wear a fawnskin covering over his face, with slits in it for his eyes and mouth and nostrils: nor might he break that vow. His songs were the sweetest that man or woman had heard: there were none in Alba sweeter. And when he played they called him the Green Harper, for a spell was upon them in that playing. He had no name among them but 'The Harper.' Once Cathba taunted him, and said openly he did not believe it

was a true *geas*, and that the man was a spy. Amid the lifting of spears and the sudden tremulous movement of swords, as though a wind were there, Aodh stood unmoved. He took his harp and played; and in the silence thereafter he touched the strings again, and chanted an old ancestral song, passing sweet. When he ceased, every weapon slept.

But now Culain of the Trails saw the Harper, with the fawnskin masque away from his face and lying at his feet on the green moss.

On a branch of a fallen oak Enya of the Dark Eyes lay, idly swaying. Her eyes were filled with light while she watched Aodh.

'My lord and my king,' she cried in a low voice, so thrilling sweet that Culain trembled, being only a youth and a dreamer of dreams. It was when Aodh had ceased singing a song to her.

Culain turned and sank among the bracken. But Aodh had heard. The arrow flew, whistling a thin song, and went in between the white shoulders of the youth, till it thrust its head into the oak-root underneath his breast.

Aodh came forward and looked at him.

'That arrow-flight is my grief,' he said gravely, 'for you are young and comely.'

'It is Culain,' whispered Enya, who had come swiftly to where the slain man lay; 'it is Culain of the Trails.'

'Yes,' answered Culain, when he had spat the blood and foam from his mouth, but without turning his head, for that he could not do, being arrow-

pinned: 'yes, it is Culain, and it is my last trail.'

'Let him be,' Enya whispered, when she saw the Harper raise his spear; 'let him be, O Aodh, my lord. He may yet live.'

'It was to make the end less hard. But as you will, Enya.' Then the two moved deeper into the wood.

Later, the runners found Culain. But he was dead. At sundown Firbis heard Enya singing in the grianân over the great Hall of the Horns. He called to her, and told her that on the morrow she was to be the wife of Cathba. Enya said no word; but at the rising of the moon she went to the forest-edge and gave three hoots of the white owl.

'Who will make a song for this marriage?' said Firbis after the ale-feast in the morning. 'Where is the Harper?'

But none had seen him. An old man said he had met him at moonrise, and that he was on a white stallion and riding against the stars of the north.

At noon, Cathba took Enya to wife. So great was her beauty, that men looked askance at him, and old men sat silent, heavy with fear.

'Sing to me,' he said.

She sang. It was a song of love. He laughed when she set down the little gold-bossed clàrsach, and put back the hair from his eyes.

'Why do you laugh, Cathba Fleetfoot?'

'Because that you know not what you sang when

you sang that song ; yet, even as you sang, so shall it be.'

Enya stooped and lifted the clàrsach again ; and as she put back her head from that stooping, her eyes filled with fire. Suddenly she laughed.

'Why do you laugh, Enya of the Dark Eyes?'

'Because Aodh the Singer, Aodh the King, is here, and he comes for me, who am his wife.'

Cathba sprang to his feet. But the wolf-thong was round him, and he was bound hand and foot before he could draw the long gold-hilted knife that he wore.

Aodh stooped and lifted him ; then he threw him upon the deerskins where Enya had lain.

'The bride-bed for you, Cathba,' said Aodh mockingly ; 'for me the bride.'

Outside the noise of spears and swords, and lamentation of men and women, and fierce cries, ceased. The hillmen were few, or they would have burned the Jûn. But Fírbis called for a truce, and bade Aodh take Enya of the Dark Eyes and go.

Thus was it that Aodh the Hill-King, Aodh the Singer, Aodh the Proud, won Enya whom he loved.

Yet he loved overmuch. It is not the way of kings, but Aodh was a poet, and he had the dream of dreams.

On the day when the Ardrigh of the Hill-Lands died, runners came to Aodh the Proud. He was to be Ardrigh. He sought Enya to tell her this thing ; but she was in the woods, or upon the hills. So he fared eastward without seeing her whom he loved.

It was in the dún of the High King that he heard Cathba had laid waste his rath and carried captive away with him Enya of the Dark Eyes.

In a night and a day he was in his own lands again. At the call of Aodh the Proud the hill-clans gathered, and he came up with the warriors and prisoners of Cathba, where the mountains break. Then was fought the Battle of the Sloping Hill.

At the setting of the sun there were crowns lying there, idle gold in the yellow sand, and no man heeded them. And where the long grass waved, there were women's breasts, so still in the brown silence, that the flitting moths, which shake with the breaths of daisies, motionlessly poised their wings above where so many sighs once were, and where no more was any pulse of joy.

The noise of spears was silent. The wild-hawk, and not the javelin, hissed in the stillness. Ravens flew where the arrows had fallen into bloody pools.

The man who had made this slaughter stood alone in that place. The warriors were in the dark glens, beyond the stream below the hill-slope, thrusting spears into pale fugitives, and laughing as they tied white women by their long hair to the boles of the pines.

This was the man called Aodh the Proud.

Aodh searched the dead. First, he looked at all those who lay fallen head forward or with upturned face. Then, disdainfully, he turned over the bodies of those speared, or slain by arrow or javelin, from behind.

He found nowhere the body of Cathba.

That night they brought him a captive woman. She was old, but bought her life with what she had to tell: for that telling was of Enya.

Cathba had not been in the Battle of the Hill-Slope. He was now in the nearest of the forest-dûns of Enya's father.

Firbis the White had ever hated Aodh, and the old man's laughter was now as loud and as long as the baying of his wolf-hound. When she had left, the woman said, Enya was lying on the deerskins, playing with the long hair of Cathba.

'She was singing a song,' added the woman.

'What song did she sing?' asked Aodh.

'It was a song of meeting winds, meeting waves, of day and night, of life and death; and at the end of each singing she sang—

*"I, Enya of the Dark Eyes, love but thee, and thee only,
O dear one,
Man of my heart art thou, thee most do I love, thee only,
O dear one!"*

Then Aodh the King knew what song Enya of the Dark Eyes had sung while she lay on the deerskins and played with the dark hair of Cathba, son of Cathba Mòr. It was a song he had heard when Enya of the Dark Eyes lay on the deerskins in the hill-dûn of him, Aodh the King, while she played with his long yellow hair.

Aodh the Proud turned and fared back alone through the field of the dead. But when the king came to his dûn, the women would not let him enter;

for he was baying like a wolf, and shaking a bloody spear, and laughing wild, and calling to a star that was hanging low in the west, '*Enya, Enya, Enya! Enya, Enya, Enya!*'

And so he was king no longer. He was called the Laughing Man, for he could throw a spear no more, but often laughed idly, with a little foam ever upon his mouth. And at the last he ate roots, and went naked, and in the end was trampled to death by the wild swine.

That is the story of Aodh the Proud, who made deathless beauty out of the beauty and love of Enya of the Dark Eyes, who sang the same song to two men.

HONEY OF THE WILD BEES

THREE years after Bobarán the Druid poet, sur-named Bobarán Bán, Bobarán the White, left Innis Manainn for the isles of the north, word came to him from the Sacred Isle that he was to beware of three things: the thought in the brain of the swallow, the arrow in the tongue of the fish, and the honey of the wild bees.

This word came to Bobarán in the island that was called Emhain Abhlach, Emhain of the Apple Trees,¹ where he dwelled with his wards, the two children of Naois and Deirdré: Gaer, a youth already tall,

¹ Emhain Abhlach, Emhain of the Apple Trees, was an ancient name of Arran in the Firth of Clyde. Gaer (Gaiar, Gaith) was the son, and Aebgreiné (Aevgrain), the Sunlike, was the daughter of the famous Deirdré (Deardhuil, Darthool) and of Naois, the eldest of the sons of Usnach. The Sacred Isle, Manainn, *i.e.* the Isle of Manannan, is the Isle of Man. The Manannan introduced here is the semi-divine son (*i.e.* son in the sense of descent) of the great Manannan, god of the waters, son of Lir the ancient elemental God. The Innse Gall alluded to once or twice are the Hebrides (the Isles of the Strangers). The Gall and the Gael were the two peoples of the north, the Gall being the Strangers or Scandinavians. The Ultonian King, Conchobar, referred to is, of course, that King of Ulster from whom Naois abducted Deirdré; and whom, twenty years or more later, Gaer (Gaiar), the son of Deirdré, ousted from sovereignty, and banished to the remote lands of Orc and Catt (the Orkneys and Caithness), only, however, to recall him to the sovereignty after the space of a year, when Gaer returned to Emhain Abhlach (Arran), to live there 'in a dream' till he died.

comely and gracious, and lordly as a king's son ; and Aevgrain, the Sunlike. The loveliness of Aevgrain was so fair to look upon, that she was held worthy to be the daughter of that Deirdrê whose beauty had set all the ancient world aflame.

When Bobarân the White received this message from Manannan mhic Manainn, Lord of the Sacred Isle and of the Isles of the Gall, he was troubled. That high king meant no juggling with words. Manannan knew that the Druid poet had the old wisdom of the symbols ; and fearing lest any others might interpret his message, had sent warning to him in this guise. That, he understood. Manannan Mac-Athgno was old, and had knowledge of desires unaccomplished and of things unfulfilled : doubtless, then, he had foreseen some peril or other evil thing for Gaer or for Aevgrain, or for both the hapless children of Naois mhic Uisneach and Deirdrê.

Yet of the message Bobarân could make nothing. After long thought, he took his clàrsach and went up through the ancient forest and out upon the desert of the great mountain which towers above all others in Emhain Abhlach.

He played gently upon his clàrsach as he went, so that no wild thing molested him. The brown wolves howled, and their fangs whitened under their red snouts ; but all leaped aside, and slid snarling out of sight. The grey wolves stood silent, watching with fierce red eyes, but did not follow. When Bobarân came to the last tree of the forest, he looked behind him, and saw an old white wolf.

He stopped.

‘Why do you follow me, O wolf?’ he asked.

The wolf blinked at him, and sniffed idly the hill-wind.

‘Why do you follow me, O wolf?’ Bobarân asked a second time. The old white wolf raised his head and howled.

Bobarân took from the hollow at the top of his clàrsach nine shrunken red berries of the rowan. Three he threw at the white wolf, and cried, ‘I put speech upon thine old wisdom.’ Three he threw into the air above his head, and cried. ‘Tear the mist, O wind.’ And three he put into his mouth, muttering, ‘By him of the Hazel-Tree, and by the Salmon of Knowledge, let seeing be upon me.’

With that he asked for the third time, ‘Why do you follow me, O wolf?’

When the wolf spoke, it was with the tongue of men—

‘The spring is come: the red fish is in the river again, the red tassel is on the larch, and the secret thought is in the brain of the swallow.’

‘There is no swallow yet on Emhain Abhlach, old wolf that has wisdom.’

‘There is even now a swallow making three flights above your head, and it will fall at your feet.’

Bobarân saw a shadow circle thrice before his eyes, and before he could stir a swallow fell dead at his feet.

While it was yet warm he looked into the brain of the bird. Because of the three sacred berries he had

swallowed, he saw. Then he was troubled because in that seeing he saw a wild boar turning at bay, and that Gaer the beautiful youth had fallen, and in his fall had broken his spear, and that the boar blinked his red savage eyes and churned the foam between his great tusks, and made ready to rush upon him and slay Gaer the son of the Beautiful One, the king's son who should yet rule the Gaeldom of Eiré.

With that Bobarân struck three shrill cries from his clàrsach, and ran headlong westward through the forest. And where he lay upon the ground, Gaer looked and saw a dancing flame before him; and before the boar was a sudden rushing torrent, and midway was a whirling sword that made a continuous bewildering dazzle as of starry fire. And that dancing flame, and that rushing torrent, and that whirling sword, were the three shrill cries from the clàrsach of Bobarân the White.

This happened then: that when the druid ran into the glade where Gaer lay, he took his clàrsach and played a spell upon the boar, so that the son of Naois rose, and lifted his broken spear, and strongly bound the two fragments together, and then with a great shout rushed upon the foam-clotted tusks and drove his spear through the red throat, so that it came out beyond the bristling fell, and passed the length of a handsbreadth into the bole of an oak that was behind the boar.

That night, Bobarân and Gaer and Aevgrain had great joy over the fires. Gaer played upon his clàrsach, and sang the chant of the death of the boar;

and Bobarân sang the long tale of Naois, the first of the three heroes of Alba, and of his great love of Deirdrê; and Aevgrain, when the stars were come, and none saw her face in the shadow, sang the love-songs of Deirdrê, and the love-song that was in her own woman's heart.

The two men were troubled by the singing of Aevgrain; Bobarân the White because of memory, Gaer because of desire. When she sang no more, both sighed. 'I hear the sound of the sea,' said Gaer.—'I hear the song of a blind bird,' said Bobarân.—'I hear silence,' whispered Aevgrain to herself, the blood going to her face lest even in that silence the secret thought in her heart should take wing, as the quiet owlet in the dusk.

But Bobarân was well pleased that night when the youth and the girl slept. For he had seen the thought in the brain of the swallow, that of which Manannan of Manainn had warned him. For now belike might the prophecy be fulfilled, that Gaer of the race of Usna and of the womb of Deirdrê should become the Ardrigh of the Gaels both of Eiré and of Alba. So he slept.

On the seventh day after that slaying of the boar, Bobarân the White walked under the falling snow of the apple-bloom, in the shore-glades behind the great conical isle that was then called Inshroin, the Isle of the Seals.

He was looking idly seaward, when suddenly he stood as though arrow-fixed. In the bay was a long galley, shaped like a great fish, and with the bows disparted as the mouth of a speared salmon. It was

a birlinn of the Innse Gall, and the coming of the sea-rovers might well be for evil.

He heard a strange music, but ear could not tell whence it came, for it was as a sweet perplexing swarm of delicate sounds; and was in the spires of the grass, and the blown drift of the thistle-down, and the bells of the foxglove, and in all the murmurous multitude of the little leaves.

So by that he knew it was a magic song. He took his clàrsach, and played an old rune of the sea, that Manannan of Manainn had taught him: Manannan, the son of Athgno, of the sons of Manannan of the Foam, son of Lir, the great god.

And when he had played, he took nine shrivelled berries of the rowan from the top of his clàrsach. Three he threw towards the waves, and cried—

‘O Element that is older than the ancient earth!

O Element that was old when Age was young!

O second of the Sacred Three in whom the seed of Alldai,
In whom the seed of the Unnameable became the spawn of
the world,

Whence the old gods, and the fair Dedannans, and the sons
of men—

O Element of the Elements, show me the fish of Manainn,
Show me the fish of Manannan with the arrow in the tongue!’

And when Bobarân had cried this incantation, he took three more of the rowan berries and threw them on the ground, and they were swift red tongues of hounds that bayed against a shadowy deer. Then, when he had swallowed the three remaining rowan berries, he saw Gaer standing by a rock on the shore, now looking towards the galley—whence came, as a

swarm of bees, the perplexing sweet murmurous noise—and now back to the woodland, where he heard the glad baying of hounds lairing the deer.

But while Bobarân wondered, he saw a beautiful naked woman standing in the prow of the birlinn, and striking the strings of a small shell harp, and singing. And when he looked at Gaer, the son of Naois was in the sea, and swimming swiftly from wave to wave, crying the name of her who bore him—Deirdré, flame of love.

But the druid saw that the beautiful woman was not Deirdré; and that in the hollow of the fish-mouth crouched a man of Lochlin, with a stretched bow in his hands, and in that bow a great arrow.

So once more he cried—

'O Element, in the name of Manannan, son of Lir!'

and then he lifted his clàrsach, and struck three shrill cries from the strings.

Thus it was that where Gaer swam against the sweet lust of his eyes three great waves arose. The first wave bore him down into the depths, so that the arrow that flew against his breast shot like a shadow through the water. The second wave whirled him this way and that, so that the arrow that flew against his back shot like a spent mackerel through the spray. The third wave hurled him on the shore, amid clouds of sand.

Bobarân fled to the place where he fell, and stood before him, and played a wind against the arrows that now came from the birlinn like rain. Then he played magic upon the sea, so that the three tidal waves

became one, and roared seaward in one high, terrible, crested, overpowering tumult, and lifted the birlinn, and hurled it upon the rocks of Inshroin, so that all there were swept into the sea and drowned.

Then Bobarán was glad, because he remembered what he had heard in Inis-Manainn — that a fair queen of the Innse Gall would seek to lure Gaer the son of Deirdré to his death, because of what Naois and the sons of Usna had done to her kinsfolk of the far isles.

That night, before the fires, he told of the hero-wars of Naois and the sons of Usna, and of how the queen of the Innse Gall came in her beauty to Naois, and of how Naois looked at Deirdré, and bade depart the yellow-haired woman with the yellow crown. Then because he was a poet he sang of her beauty, and of the infinite bitter sweetness of desire, and of the long ache and continuous unsatisfied longing that is called love.

When he ceased, he saw that neither Gaer nor Aevgrain listened to his singing voice. But in the eyes of Gaer he saw the infinite bitter sweetness of desire, and in the eyes of Aevgrain the ache and longing of unawakened love.

On the morrow, Bobarán was walking, heavy with thought. Peradventure the day was near when another evil would come to the children of Naois and of Deirdré. He feared, too, lest he had lit a fire in the mind of Gaer and in the heart of Aevgrain.

While he was yet pondering what thus perplexed him, he saw three drawing near. One was Aevgrain,

sunlike indeed in her lovely beauty, but with strange, grave eyes; and one was Gaer coming as Naois when he was seen of Deirdr  in the woods of Conchobar, laughing with delight; and one was a young man, the fairest and comeliest Bobar n the White had ever seen. He was clad in green, with a fillet of gold, with belt-clasps of shining findruiney. His hair was long and yellow, yet he was not of the men of Lochlin.

He bowed courteously as he drew near. Bobar n saw that he threw three berries of the mistletoe on the ground, and asked him concerning these, and that doing.

‘It is my *geas*, my vow,’ said the stranger. ‘It is one of my *geasan* that I throw three berries of the mistletoe on the ground before I speak to an honourable one of the Druids.’

Bobar n accepted that saying, for it was in the manner of his day.

And because that he himself was under *geas* not to ask a stranger more than two questions, he spoke at once, lest idly he should ask a vain thing.

‘Are you of Emhain Abhlach, fair lord?’ he asked.

‘Yes, I am of the Isle of the Apple Trees,’ answered the stranger, with grave eyes.

‘And your name and your father’s name, are they known to me?’

‘I am Rinn, the son of Eochaidh Iuil.’

‘Doubtless Eochaidh Iuil is a king in . . . in . . .’

‘What of your *geas*, O Bobar n-B n?’

At this the druid bowed ashamedly, for he had

broken his *geas*. He stood amazed, too, that Rinn, the son of Eochaidh, should know what that *geas* was.

'I am come here,' said Rinn slowly, and in a voice so sweet to hear that the druid thought he had heard none so sweet since he had heard Deirdr  singing low as she played at chess with Naois.

'That was when Gaer was asleep within her womb,' said Rinn.

So, knowing that the stranger could read what was in his mind, Bobar n feared the magic of spells. But when he put his hand to his side, he found that his cl rsach was gone; and when he looked, he saw that Rinn had lifted it from the ground; and when he strove to speak, he understood that by the third berry of the mistletoe the stranger had put silence against his lips.

So, with a heavy heart, he turned and followed the three to the pleasant *lios* which at that season was their home.

At dusk, before the fires, Rinn sang and told fair wonderful tales. And when he had told one tale, Gaer knew that it was of him he spoke: and of how on the morrow he would cross the sea to Eir  and contest with Conchobar, who had been the death-maker for his love Deirdr  and for Naois and the sons of Usna, for the sovereignty of the Ultonians: and of how he would banish Conchobar to the far surf-swept Isles of Orcc: and of how, after a year of sovereignty, and because of the longing of love and the dream of all dreams, he would return to Emhain Abhlach, and recall Conchobar to be Ardrigh: and

of how he would live there till he died, and of how he would know love great as the love of Naois, and beauty great as the beauty of Deirdré.

And in that dream sleep came upon him, and when Gaer slept, Rinn took the clàrsach again, and again played. He sang the song of love. Bobarân saw a forest glade filled with moonshine, and in that moonshine was a woman, white and beautiful, and the face was the face of Alveen whom he had loved. His heart rose like a wave: his life swung on the crest of that wave: and as a wave he broke in a flood of longing and desire at the feet of Alveen whom he had loved long, long ago.

And in that dream sleep came upon him, and he knew no more.

When Bobarân slept, Rinn looked at Aevgrain, whose eyes were shining upon him as two stars.

'Play me no sweet songs, O Rinn,' she murmured, 'for already I love you, O heart's desire, my delight!'

Rinn smiled, but he touched the strings of his harp.

'O heart's desire, my delight!' he whispered.

'O heart's desire!' she murmured, as sleep came upon her. Then her white hands moved like swans through the shadowy flood that was her hair, and she put sleep from her, and leaned forward, looking into the eyes of Rinn.

'Tell me who you are, whence you are,' she whispered.

'Will you love me if I tell this thing?'

'You are my heart's desire.'

'Will you follow me if I tell this thing?'

Aevgrain rose. The firelight waved a rose of flame into her face.

Rinn laughed low, and he put his arms about her and led her into the lios.

At sunrise Manannan stood on the shore, and when he looked along the suntrack he saw Gaer sailing into the west.

Then he went to the lios. There was no one there: there was no single thing to be seen there save two pale blue shadows lying in the sunway.

Then he awoke Bobarân.

'Put that youth-dream from you,' he said, 'and answer me. Where is Gaer? Where is Aevgrain?'

Bobarân bowed his head.

'What of the wild-boar that was the peril of Gaer, that was the thought in the brain of the swallow?'

'It is slain, O Manannan of Manainn.'

'What of the white woman and the death-shaft, that was the arrow in the tongue of the fish?'

'They are in the silence of the sea.'

'What of the witching voice of Rinn, the Lord of Shadow, Rinn the son of Eochaidh Iuil, of the Land of Heart's Desire? What of his witching song, that is called the Honey of the Wild Bees?'

Bobarân the Druid bowed his head.

'He put his spells upon me and upon Gaer. I know no more.'

'Gaer you shall see once more, for he will come again to Emhain Abhlach, but he will not know you, for you shall be a grey wolf howling in the waste. But Aevgrain we shall not see again. Farewell, O daughter of Deirdré, desire of my desire!'

And with that Manannan turned, and was hidden in a sea-mist, and was in Manainn again, the Sacred Isle.

But already Bobarán had not waited for that going. His fell bristled as he leaped past the lios, and his long howl rose and sank till lost in the silence of the woods.

At sundown on the third day the two shadows in the lios stirred. Sweet clay of the world was upon them again.

‘Tell me what you are, whence you are,’ murmured Aevgrain, her eyes shadowy with love.

‘Will you love me if I tell this thing?’

‘You are my heart’s desire.’

‘Will you follow?’

Aevgrain strove to rise. The sunflood warmed a rose of flame in her pale face.

‘I love you, Aevgrain, because you are beautiful, and because that in you I see the shadow of the beauty of all beauty. Await here. It is my will.’

‘I have no love but you. You are my heart’s desire.’

Rinn sighed.

‘So be it,’ he said. ‘I will take with me your love. Overlong have I dreamed this dream. Hark to that great sighing!’

‘I hear.’

‘It is the sighing of the world. It is for me.’

‘For you——?’

‘I am called Rinn, Honey of the Wild Bees. I am the Lord of Shadow. But here, O Aevgrain, my name is—Death.’

THE BIRDS OF EMAR¹

‘WHEN Cairill, Ardree of the southlands of Albyn that are washed by the unquiet waters of the Moyle, was hunting, in a lonely place and with only one hound, he found that the two lives that are one life may touch and be at one.

He was stooping over the print of a doe in the bracken, when his hound leaped aside and fled swiftly by the way they had come. Cairill stared, then moved back a spray of mistletoe which hung from the oak where he leaned. He heard a crackle under his feet, and saw a long, narrow ash-shaft break in two: and his feet trod upon the white hands of a man lying asleep. The man was young. He was clad in green, with a gold chain round his neck, with breast-bosses, necklet, and anklets of pale findruiney. When he rose, he was tall, lithe as a sapling, his face young and smooth as a girl's, his hair yellow-white like the bog-cotton in the shine of the sun.

Cairill looked at him.

‘Though you are welcome to see,’ he said, ‘I do not know your face.’

¹ For the original version of one or two episodes in these old dreams redreamed and fashioned anew, the reader is referred to the *Mabinogi of Pwyll*, to the *Mabinogi of Branwen*, and to the *Mabinogi of Manwyddan*.

‘I know yours, Cairill mac Cairill. And because you have put this slight upon me I will do a hurt to your kingship.’

‘What hurt will you do, and who are you to do a hurt to Cairill Swiftspear?’

‘I am |Keevan of Emhain Abhlach.¹ I can put any evil upon you. But it is my *geas* not to put evil upon any one who has meant me no evil.’

‘It is my *geas* to refuse no courteous, kingly offer in place of death or shame.’

‘That is well. You have done me a wrong by that treading upon me. I am not of your human clan. That tread shall be a bruise upon me for a year and a day. But let it be thus. For a year and a day I will take your shape upon me, and you will take mine; and I will go to Caer Charill, and you will go to Emhain Abhlach: and no one shall know this thing, neither your queen nor any of my lordly folk, nor your dogs nor mine, nor your sword nor my sword, nor spear, nor drinking-shell, nor clàrsach nor tympan.’

‘And what have I to fear in this?’

‘I have a foe, Fergal. Beware of Fergal at the rising of the moon. And what have I to fear with you?’

‘The love of Dorcha, who is my leman.’

Keevan laughed.

¹ Ciabhan. Emhain Abhlach, the ancient Gaelic name of Arran, is also the Scottish equivalent of the isle of Avalon. Both names mean the Isle of Apple-trees. Ciabhan would therefore be a prince of Faery.

‘That is everywhere,’ he said ; ‘among the dragons in the stars and the worms in the earth.’

‘And how shall I know that this is only for a year and a day, Keevan Honeymouth?’

‘I swear it by the seven universal things: by the sun and by the moon, by flame and wind and water, the dew, and day and night.’

With that they changed shapes, and Keevan went back to Caer Charill, and none knew him from Cairill, not even Dorcha when he lay with her, and she looked at him darkly while he slept: and, in Emhain Abhlach, none knew Cairill to be other than Keevan, not even Keevan’s wife, Malveen of the Honey Hair.

Thus was it for a year and a day.

Before the third quarter of that year, Dorcha put a serpent in a pillow of moss, and lay by Keevan to see him die. But the fierce worm knew his kindred, and whispered in Keevan’s ear. That whispering made a dream. Keevan rose, and took a reed with holes in it from the wall: and played silence and stillness on Dorcha, and so the serpent stained her white breast with its milk-white teeth, and at that little red spot she died.

And before the third quarter of that year, when, after a long hunting, Cairill lay by Malveen of the Honey Hair, Keevan’s wife rose, and made a sign to Fergal. It was at the lifting of the moon. He stood in the shadow of an old oak, and the bow was drawn so that it hummed in the wind like a gnat, and an arrow was in that bow, and the arrow had the poison

of moonseed that even the Tuatha Dé fear at the rising of the moon.

But the serpent in Keevan's ear had whispered this also: therefore he played a dream into Cairill's mind: thus the strayed king dreamed, and knew that dream for a divination. So Cairill rose and threw his green cloak about Malveen, and bade her look if the moon had reached its third change of gold. She looked, and the arrow of Fergal went into her breast, and the moonseed moved into her heart, and she died.

Fergal came near, laughing low. 'There will be lamentation in Faery,' he said, 'but you will be my queen now, Malveen of the Honey Hair.'

'Yes,' said Cairill, who had taken the arrow from Malveen's breast, 'there will be lamentation in Faery.'

And with that he flung the arrow at Fergal, and it entered into his eye, so that he knew darkness and silence and was no more.

At dawn the folk of Emhain Abhlach buried them, in hollowed places under running water, with two flat stones above them pointed flowward.

That night Cairill sat alone. Old dreams were with him. Greatly he longed.

A woman drew near. She was as white and wonderful as moonflame with the evening star in it. She had hair dusky and soft as the long, warm shadows of afternoon. Her eyes were more darkly blue than the wing of the kingfisher, and the light in them was like the dew that hangs in speedwells. Her hands were so white that when she played upon her little

'gold clàrsach they were the foam of waves in moon-shine. Through the green grass her feet moved, wandering lilies.

She played a song upon Cairill.

It was so passing sweet that his life died to a breath.

'What is the song?' he said.

'The song of longing,' she said. Her voice was as an eddy of twilight air above white clover.

She played again. It was so wild a music that the blood clanged against his heart like a storm of swords against a shield.

'What is that song?' he asked.

'The song of desire,' she said. Her voice was as the gathering of wind in woods.

She played again. He heard the waves of the sea lapping the snows on the summits of great hills, and all the white sap and green wonder of the earth moving into flame, and betwixt sun and moon the myriad tempest of the snow of stars.

'What is that song?' he asked.

'The song of love,' she said. Her voice was as the still breath of a flower.

'My name is Emar,' she whispered, 'and I will come again. You are my desire and my one love.'

But he did not see her again till he was once more in Caer Charill, and Keewan was in his own shape and in Emhain Abhlach again.

One day, when he was throwing javelins at an oaken disc, he saw a woman. She was more beautiful than any woman he had seen. She was fair as

Emar, but her beauty was the beauty of a woman and not of those behind the dew and the moonshine.

‘Who and whence are you, O fair one?’ he asked.

‘I am Emar,’ she said. Then she wooed him, and he made her his queen.

At the marriage feast a stranger rose.

He put down his drinking shell, and when he spoke his voice made a sound like a distant horn against the shields on the wall.

‘I claim a boon,’ he said.

‘It is my *geas* not to refuse a boon to a stranger,’ said Cairill.

‘I am Balva of Emhain Abhlach. Emar put love upon me long ago. I claim her as my boon.’

Cairill rose.

‘Take my life,’ he said.

But Emar went to his side. ‘Not so,’ she said. Then she turned to Balva.

‘This day year you may come again.’ With that he smiled, and gave that respite, and went away.

But in that year Cairill and Emar knew the depth and wonder of love. ‘I must go, but I will come again,’ she said, when the day drew near. Then she told Cairill what to do.

On the dusk of the day when Balva came again and took Emar with him, Cairill put dew on his eyelids, and made a twisted wand out of withes of hazel and rowan, and at the rising of the moon went forth, disguised as a blind beggar playing on a reed-flute.

When he came upon Balva and Emar, Balva spoke.

‘That is a sweet-singing flute, Blind One. If you will give it to me, I will give you your heart’s desire. That is my *geas*, if I ask for a flute, a falcon, a hound, or a woman.’

Cairill laughed. He put his blindness from him. ‘Give me Emar,’ he said.

For a year thereafter Cairill and Emar knew deep joy.

On the night when labour came upon her, a wind struck the place where she lay, and the child was whirled away like a blown leaf. Cairill was wrought with anger and grief, but Emar said no word. She dreamed against the dawn.

At dawn a young man approached them. He was more fair than any man Cairill had even seen, fairer than Balva, fairer than Keevan. He came like spring through green woods.

‘The hour is come,’ he said looking at Emar.

‘The hour is come,’ he said again, looking at Cairill.

‘Who is this grown man of youth, with the beautiful years upon him?’ asked Cairill.

‘It is our son Ailill,’ answered Emar, ‘he who was born last night.’

Emar rose and kissed Cairill on the lips. ‘Farewell, dear mortal love,’ she said.

Then Ailill took the reed-flute wherewith Cairill had won Emar again, and played old age upon Cairill, so that he grew white, and withered as an elm-leaf. When he was but a shadow, Ailill played away the shadow of that shadow, and then the idle breath went out upon the wind.

II

Ailill brought fruit to Emar, and he gave her a flower that he had in his hair. She knew the smell of that flower, where it grew in Fmhain Abhlach: and she had eaten of that fruit when she had known immortal things.

For an hour she and Ailill talked of mysteries, and of beauty.

'You have forgotten much,' he said: 'since you ask me why that I have my comely manhood upon me when you bore me only last night.'

'I asked as a woman, Ailill. I bore you.'

He smiled.

'If, last night, you had put dew in your hand, and let a ray of the Secret Star fall into it, you would have known. I was a long way from here when I heard you calling. As I came, the wind wore me to a shadow. When I was beside you, I was a little eddy of air. Then the Haughty Father breathed, and I was in his breath, and the breath quickened that which was within you. When Balva snatched me away he flung me at the feet of Him who is the mystery of the Red and White and Black: and my mortal clay was like the old wax of bees: and that you have Ailill for son is because Angus and Midir, who loved you long, long ago, and ever love you, came between me and the wind.'

'I remember,' said Emar softly.

'Angus lifted me. "He is mine,"' he said, "be-

cause he is the child of love, that is all in all because it is love. And he is mine, because those who die young are mine. And he is 'mine, because I am the Dart-thrower."

'Midir, who wore a cloak of green leaves, with the veins under his earth-brown skin filled with white sap, lifted the ash-staff he carried. At the end of it was a little moon-white flame. This he put to the clay that was as the old wax of bees: and I felt the sap rise and the blood flow, and I was on my feet, leaning against the tree into which Midir had gone, as the wind goes into grass, and looking into the sky where I saw Angus the Helmsman sitting in the Great Galley, and singing as he sailed along the shining coasts of the stars.'

Emar leaned and kissed Ailill. 'Then you came to me, my dream?'

'Yes. And because we are of the kin of Angus, the dream that we dream is beyond the thrust of the spear.'

Then Emar and Ailill talked of secret things.

At noon, that is at the hour of hours, they rose and went out into the world. None went with them but the three birds, under a spell of sleep, which Ailill had brought to Emar from Angus, who loved her.

They fared far. One day they came to the City of the Rock, and stayed there for seven days. These were seven years, in the reckoning of men. For seven days they stayed there, listening to the song of the three birds of Emar.

Then they left the City of the Rock, and fared north.

One day, at dawn, in a wood, they saw a fair girl herding milch-deer, with two fawns by her side. Emar saw a flush come into Ailill's face, and his eyes shone. One of the sleeping birds flew, and hovered above the fawns, singing. The girl lifted her face, and her eyes saw Ailill, and she grew white with immortal love, and shadows came into her eyes.

'I am Muireall,' she said, 'the daughter of Eoan and Finola, and am of the old race, as I see you are, Emar daughter of him of the grey dominions, and, Ailill son of Emar.'

Then they knew that the bird had sung their names. She took them to her grianán on a sun-swept mound in the wood. Her father lay there. Long ago he had eaten mistletoe-berries in moonshine, and had not waked again. Finola, loving him more than life, had changed herself into the white stillness of sleep, and was a dream in his mind, and lay quiet and glad and at rest.

For seven days, that were years, Emar and Ailill stayed with Muireall in the grianán. Ailill learned the three songs of Angus. There is no joy and no wonder like that joy and that wonder.

At the end of that time Eoan heard the singing of Emar's birds, and rose. Finola was still a dream in his mind, but she too waked and stood beside him, lovely in changeless youth.

On the morrow Emar and Ailill and Muireall left the grianán in the wood. They went into the world and wandered many days. They followed the stars called The Hounds, that point to the North Star.

They saw none but shepherds and wandering folk.

One night, in a wood of old lichened trees, they met a god, with the head and breast of a hawk. His eyes were terrible, but he did not speak to them, nor do evil. They followed him, and came to a place where he crouched and worshipped. They saw nothing but an ancient flat stone, above which, though there was no wind, a maze of dead leaves whirled ceaselessly.

Three days after that they heard the inland sigh of the sea. It was among dry trees and bent grass. The shadows of seabirds often were, and in a moment were not, on green slopes.

At sundown they came suddenly upon a sandy dune, and saw a man walking swiftly. He was fair and wonderful. Two waves ran behind him like hounds. By these, and by the foambells on his sun-bright locks, Ailill knew that he was Manànn the son of Manànn mac Lir.

There was great joy in that meeting. Manànn looked on Emar, and knew that he need dream no more. He took them to a sun-filled cave by the sea, and gave them food and drink. Ailill bestowed Emar upon him, and Emar and Manànn loved as Ailill and Muireall loved.

They dwelled together for seven days that are years, while the birds of Emar sang.

One day, at the end of that time, Dalua, the Amadan Dhu, passed that way and looked at them as they slept. The two waves of Manànn were blind too, flat and motionless.

Long ago he too had loved Emar. But Manànn had slighted him, and Manànn mac Lîr had banned him from the sea.

He took his reed-pipe and played softly. He played silence upon the two waves: deep sleep upon the sleepers. Then he changed one of the singing birds of Emar into a swallow, and it flew to the south: and another to a cuckoo, and it flew to the west: and the third to a crane, and it flew to the east. Then out of the north he brought a swarm of crows, and told them to eat up the land and the ripe grain. Then Dalua took his reed again, and played one of the songs that are older than the Tuatha Dé.

When Manànn and Ailill and Muireall woke they heard no singing of the birds, and saw that Emar was no longer with them. The land was already desolate.

‘Dalua has done this,’ said Manànn, frowning with black rage: ‘and we shall all know death if we do not move to where life is. The crows eat up the grain, and a blight is on every green thing, and on the earth.’

As they passed from the cave, Muireall looked longingly at a white flower that grew in a little sunlit space of soft grass and seapinks. But her heart was too heavy to pluck it.

It was Emar, whom Dalua had thus changed, and himself into the green stalk with grey silky petals which enclosed and upheld her.

But by the loss of the birds, and through the

spells of Dalua, they were as folk of perishing clay again.

After many wanderings, for many seasons, wherein Manànn made baskets and other wicker-woven things, while Muireall sang, and Ailill played upon a tympan, and so thus won food and shelter, they came again to the Alban southlands, and to Solway shores.

The wind and tide were from the south : and when Manànn lifted the foam to his brow he had his old powers again, and when he looked behind him he saw his two following waves, leaping and playing upon the yellow sands.

But Ailill and Muireall were sad, because to them no change came. On the morrow a worse evil chanced : for as they walked silently through a wood, the tribesmen of Scarva, who had usurped the kingship of that realm, took them captive, and they were thrown into a dark hollow in the rock on which Dun Scarva was built.

Scarva and Gàra his wife would have been glad to take Manànn also, but could not. One day he was walking in the wood, and saw a white fawn running through the bracken. He sent his two waves after it, for he knew it was Gàra, and that she had hoped to wile him to throw the one spear he carried. The two waves came upon her, and she would have died drowning, but that she cried for mercy. Manànn spared her, if she would swear by the sun and by the moon, by flame and wind and water, by the dew, and by day and night, that Ailill and Muireall should be

set free. Further, that Scarva should give to him for three days, and a day and a night, the White Hound he kept, which Myrlyn had given him because of a service.

And that was done.

On the first day, the White Hound led Manànn and Ailill and Muireall through an enchanted forest down to the sea, and thence by a secret way to the Isle of Manànn mac Lir; so that Manànn went to and fro again in his own land.

On the second day, the White Hound swam before the galley in which Ailill sat alone, and led him and the two following waves of Manànn to Emhain Abhlach, where he too was in his own land.

On the third day, the White Hound led Ailill through a wood to where Dalua slept, with his hazel-wand on the moss, and with Emar by his side.

Ailill lifted the wand and waved silence and trance upon Dalua. In that moment Dalua dreamed, and because of his shifting dream Emar was changed into a white flower, and lay upon his breast. But Ailill plucked the flower, and whispered, and Emar stood beside him again, fair and wonderful, with dark immortal eyes.

Before Emar and Ailill went, with the two waves of Manànn, and the three birds, red, and white, and black, Ailill waved 'following' upon Dalua, so that he rose and followed the White Hound. All that night and all the next day they moved swiftly across unknown ways, till they reached the edge of the world.

It was then that the spell passed from him, and he waked, and looked down into the abyss where the stars were shining.

Then Dalua wept, because of that infinitude, and because he knew that a thousand years would pass before he could win his way again to Emhain Abhlach.

On the night of that day, which was the end of the three days and a night and a day, Scarva the Ardree waked suddenly, for he heard the baying of the White Hound. And when he let the hound in, the hound lay down and died. There was a black spot on the whiteness between his red eyes.

‘What is that?’ asked the King of a druid who knew mysteries.

‘It is the touch of Dalua,’ said the druid. ‘It is the touch of Dalua, the Amadan Dhu, that gives madness or death.’

And still the birds of Emar sing old forgotten songs that are for ever new: and there is none that may not hear, at the rising of the moon, in the falling of the dew, amid the greening of the world.

ULAD OF THE DREAMS

I

IN the sea-loch now known as that of Tarbert of Loch Fyne, but in the old far-off days named the Haven of the Foray, there was once a grianân, a sunbower, of so great a loveliness, that throughout all lands of the Gael the strings of the singing men's clàrsachs ceaselessly stirred to it, as at a breath of the beauty of all beauty.

This was in the days before the yellow-haired men of Lochlin came swarming in their galleys, along the lochs and fjords of the west. So long ago was it that none knows if Ulad sang his song to Fand before Diarmid the Fair was slain on the narrow place between the two lochs, or if it were when Colum's white robes were wont to come out of the open sea up the Loch of the Swans, that is now West Loch Tarbert, so as to reach the inlands.

But what matters the whitherset of bygone days, where the tale of the years and of the generations is as that of autumn's leaves?

Ulad was there, the poet-king; and Fand, whom he loved; and Life and Death.

None knows whence Ulad came. In the Isles of the West men said he was a prince out of the realm

of the Ultonians ; but there, in the north of Eiré, they said he was a king in the southlands. Art the White, the wise old Ardrigh of the peoples who dwelled among the lake-lands far south, spoke of Ulad as one born under a solitary star on the night of the Festival of Beltane, and told that he came out of an ancient land north or south of Muirnict, the sea which has the feet of Wales and Cornwall upon its sunrise side, and the rocks and sands of Armorica upon that where the light reddens the west. But upon Ioua, that is now Iona, there was one wiser even than Art the White—Dùach the Druid ; and when questioned as to Ulad the poet-king, he said he was of the ancient people that dwelt among the inlands of Alba, the old race that had known the divine folk, the Tuatha-de-Danànn, when they were seen of men, and no mortality was upon their sweet clay. The islanders were awed by what Dùach told them ; for what manner of man could this be who had seen Merlin going tranced through the woods, playing upon a reed, with wolves fawning upon him, and the noise of eagles' wings ruffling the glooms of the forest overhead ?

And of Fand, has even the secret wind an echo ? Bèl the Harper, whose songs and playing made women's hearts melt like wax, and in men wrought either intolerable longing or put sudden swift flames into the blood, sang of her. And what he sang was this : that Ulad had fared once to Hy Bràsil, and had there come upon a garth of white blooms, fragrant and wonderful, under the hither base of a rainbow.

These flowers he had gathered, and warmed all night against his breast, and at the thinning of the dark breathed into them. When the sunbreak slid a rising line along the dawn he blew a frith across the palm of his left hand. What had been white blooms, made rosy with his breath and warm against his side, was a woman. It was Fand.

Who, then, can tell whether Ulad were old or young when he came to the Haven of the Foray? He had the old ancient wisdom, and mayhap knew how to wrap himself round with the green life that endures.

None knew of his being in that place, till, one set of a disastrous day, a birlinn drove in before the tempest sweeping from the isle of Arran up the great sea-loch of Fionn. The oarsmen drew breath when the headlands were past, and then stared with amaze. Overagainst the bay in the little rocky promontory on the north side was a house built wondrously, and that where no house had stood, and after a fashion that not one of them had seen. All marvelled with wide eyes. The sunset flamed upon it, so that its shining walls were glorious. A small round grianán it was, but built all of blocks and stones of hill-crystal, and upborne upon four great pine-boles driven deep into the tangled grass and sand, with these hung about with deerskins and fells of wolf and other savagery.

Before this grianán the men in the birlinn, upon whom silence had fallen, and whose listless oars made no lapping upon the foam-white small leaping

Waves of the haven, beheld a man lying face downward.

For a time they thought the man was dead. It was one, they said, some great one, who had perished at the feet of his desire. Others thought he was a king who had come there to die alone, as Balva the Solitary had done, when he had known all that man can know. And some feared that the prone man was a demon, and the shining grianân a dreadful place of spells. The howling of a wolf, in the opposite glen that is called Strathnamara, brought sweat upon their backs; for when the half-human wish evil upon men, they hide their faces, and the howling of a she-wolf is heard.

But of a sudden the helmsman made a sign. 'It is Ulad,' he whispered hoarsely, because of the salt in his throat after that day of flight and long weariness; 'it is Ulad of the Dreams.' Then all there were glad, for each man knew that Ulad of the Dreams, that was a poet and a king, wrought no ill against any clan, and that wherever he was the swords slept.

Nevertheless they marvelled much that he was there alone, and in that silence, with his face prone upon the wilderness, while the sunset flamed overagainst the grianân that was now like wine, or like springing blood, light and wonderful. But as tide and wind brought the birlinn close upon the shore, they heard a twofold noise, a rumour of strange sound. One looked at the other with amaze that grew into fear. For the twofold sound was wrought of the muffled sobs and prayers of the man who lay upon the grass,

and of the laughter of the woman who was unseen, but who was within the grianân.

Donncha, the helmsman and leader of the seafarers, waved to his fellows to pull the birlinn close in among the weedy masses which hung from the rocks. When the galley lay there, all but hidden, and each man's head was beneath the wrack, Donncha rose. Slowly he moved to where Ulad lay, face downward, upon the silt of sand and broken rock that was in front of the grianân. But before he could speak, the young king rose, though not seeing the newcomer, and looking upon the sunbower, whence the laughter suddenly ceased, raised his arms.

Then, when he had raised his arms, song was upon his lips. It was a strange chant that Donncha heard, and had the sound in it of the wind far out at sea, or of a tempest moving across treeless moors, mournful, wild, filled with ancient sorrow and a crying that none might interpret. The words of it, familiar to the helmsman, and yet with a strange lip-life upon them, were as these—

'Ah, you in the grianân there, whose laughter is on me as fire-flames,

What of the sorrow of sorrows that is mine because of my loving—

You that came to me out of the place where the rainbows are builded,

Is it woman you are, O Fand, who laughest up there in thy silence?

Sure, I have loved thee through storm and peace, through the day and the night ;

Sure, I have turned my singing of songs to a marvellous swan-song for thee ;

- And death have I dared, and life have I dared, and gloom and the grave,
And yet, O Fand, thou laughest down on my pain, on my pain,
O Fand.

All things have I thrown away gladly only to win thee—
Kingship and lordship of men, the fame of the sword, and all good things—
For in thee at the last, I dreamed, in thee, O Fand, Queen of Women,
I had found all that a man may find, and was as the gods who die not.

But what of all this to me, who am Ulad the King, the Harper,
Ulad the Singer of Songs that are fire in the hearts of the hearers,
Ulad the Dànann-Lord, who can bridle the winds and the billows,
Can lay waste the greatest of dúnns or build grianáns here in the wilds—

What of all this to me, who am only a man that seeketh,
That seeketh for ever and ever the Soul that is fellow to his—
The Soul that is thee, O Fand, who wert born of flowers 'neath the rainbow,
Breathed with my breath, warmed at my breast, O Fand, whom I love, whom I worship?

For all things are vain unto me, but one thing only, and that not vain is—
My Dream, my Passion, my Hope, my Love, whom I won from Hy Bràsil :
O Dream of my life, my Glory, O Rose of the World, my Dream,
Lo, death for Ulad the King, if thou failest, for all that I am of the Dànann who die not.'

And when he had chanted these words, Ulad, who was young and wondrous fair to look upon, held out his arms to Fand, whom yet he did not see, for she was within the grianán.

‘Then, if even not yet at the setting of the day,’ the king muttered, ‘patience shall be upon me till the coming of a new day, when it may be that Fand will hear my prayer.’

And so the night fell. But when the screaming of gulls came over the loch, and the plaintive crying of lapwings was upon the moorland, and the smell of loneroid and bracken was heavy in the wind-fallen stillness, Ulad turned, and stared with wild eyes, for he felt a touch upon his shoulder.

It was Donncha who touched him, and he knew the man. He had the old wisdom of knowing all that is in the mind by looking into the eyes, and he knew how the man had come there.

‘Let the men who are your men, O Donncha, move away from here in their birlinn, and go further up into the haven.’

And because he knew mysterious things, and was wise with old wisdom, the islander did as Ulad bade, and without question. But when they were alone again, he spoke—

‘Ulad, great lord, I am a man who is as idle sand beneath the feet of you who know the old wisdom, and are young with ancient youth, and are a great king in some land I know not of—so, at the least, men say. But I know one thing that you do not know.’

‘If you will tell me one thing that I do not know, O Donncha, you shall have your heart’s desire.’

Donncha laughed at that.

‘Not even you, O Ulad, can give me my heart’s desire.’

'And what will that desire be, then, you whom the islesmen call Donncha the Wise?'

'That 'one might see in the dew the footsteps of old years returning.'

'That thing, Donncha, I cannot do.'

'And yet you would do what is a thing as vain as that?'

'Speak. I will listen.'

Then Donncha drew close to Ulad, and whispered in his ear. Thereafter he gave him a hollow reed with holes in it, such as the shepherding folk use on the hills. And with that he went away into the darkness.

When the moon rose, Ulad took the reed and played upon it. While he played, scales fell from his eyes, and dreams passed from his brain, and his heart grew light. Then he sang—

'Come forth, Fand, come forth, beautiful Fand, my woman, my fawn,

The smell of thy falling hair is sweet as the breath of the wild-brier—

I weary of this white moonshine who love better the white sheen of thy breasts,

And the secret song of the gods is faint beside the craving in my blood.

Fand, Fand, Fand, white one, who art no dream but a woman,

Come forth from the grianâin, or lo, by the word of me, Ulad the King,

Forth shalt thou come as a she-wolf, and no more be a woman,

Come forth to me, Fand, who am now as a flame for thy burning !'

Thereupon a low laugh was heard, and Fand came out of the grianán. White and beautiful she was, the fairest of all women, and Ulad was glad. When near, she whispered under the shadow of his hair, and hand in hand they went back into the grianán.

At dawn Ulad looked upon the beauty of Fand. He saw she was as a flower.

‘O fair and beautiful dream,’ he whispered; but of a sudden Fand laughed in her sleep, and he remembered what Donncha the Wise had told him.

‘Woman,’ Ulad muttered then, ‘I see well that you are not my dream, but only a woman.’ And with that he half rose from her.

Fand opened her eyes, and the beauty of them was greater for the light that was there.

‘Then you are only Ulad, a man?’ she cried, and she put her arms about him, and kissed him on the lips and on the breast, sobbing low as with a strange gladness. ‘I will follow you, Ulad, to death, for I am the woman of your love.’

‘Ay,’ he said, looking beyond her, ‘if I feed you, and call you my woman, and find pleasure in you, and give you my manhood.’

‘And what else would you, O Ulad?’ Fand asked, wondering.

‘I am Ulad the Lonely,’ he answered; this, and no more.

Then, later, he took the hollow reed again, and again played. And when he had played he looked at Fand. He saw into her heart and into her mind.

‘I have dreamed my dream,’ he said; ‘but I am still Ulad the Seer.’

With that he blew a frith across the palm of his left hand, and said this thing:—

‘O woman that would not come to me, when I called out of that within me which is I myself, farewell!’

And with that Fand was a drift of white flowers there upon the deerskins.

Then once more Ulad spoke—

‘O woman, that heeded no bitter prayer which I made, but at the last came only as a she-wolf to the wolf, farewell!’

And with that a wind-eddy scattered the white flowers upon the deerskins, and they wavered hither and thither, and some were stained by the pale wandering fires of a drifting rainbow.

At noon, the seafarers came towards the grianân with songs and offerings.

But Ulad was not there.

II

For three years after Ulad wooed Fand in the grianân in the Haven of the Foray, none who knew him of old beheld his shining eyes.

Some said he had gone to Tir-na’n-Og; some that he had sailed for the Islands of Desire. His galley had been seen in the north, so rumour ran; its prow set for those isles where the fabled Fomorians lived,

those Hebrid isles given over to wild seas, wild winds, and wild men. Others had recognised the white sail with the yellow star off the coast of Eri, in the sun-track that lies under the rainbow in the west over Hy Bràsil. Meanwhile the poets sang of the Lonely King, of Fand whom he had won and lost, and of the Melancholy of Ulad. Of these songs, the sweetest and most marvellous were those of Bèl the Harper—he whose songs and playing made women's hearts melt like wax, and in men wrought either intolerable longing or put sudden swift flames into the blood.

Bèl the Harper sang of Fand. Fair she was and wonderful; but when Ulad had looked into her mind, he had seen there only the shadow of his own passion, and the phantom of his own love, and the image of his loneliness.

All men knew the tale, for Bèl sang it by forest-fires and in the raths where the women, too, listened with shining eyes.

Was she a woman as other women are? they wondered; she whom Ulad had wrought in Hy Bràsil out of a garth of white blooms gathered under the hither base of a rainbow—gathered, and warmed all night against his breast, and at dawn become a woman there by his side.

Meanwhile dark days were upon all the regions of the Gael, in Eri, and in Alba. Wars went to and fro. The sword was like a travelling bird. The forests and valleys had a harvest of the red flowers of flame.

- Great kings perished : some in battle, some taken unawares, some ignobly. The ollavs and the bards were awestricken. A sound of lamentation prevailed throughout distracted lands. In the dim recesses of the ancient woods the deathless alien folk congregated in the obscurities of twilight, in the blackness of night. Old forgotten gods came and sat by desolate pools, staring into prophetic waters. The tall deathly women who take their hearts in their hands and play the fatal music of impossible desires, these flame-eyed demons haunted the black pine-forests. Among the oaks, inhuman shapes sat and brooded. Strange portents were upon the mountains in the west, in the north, and in the east : out of the south came wild rains, thunders, shakings, and tremblings of the earth.

At the end of the third year there was no great king left.

Brooding chieftains eyed each other jealously, but there was no commune of swords.

The rich and the poor, the lordly and the ignoble, dwelled in fear of their fellow-men, and in worse fear of the demons, the congregating gods out of forgotten places, the laughter of a dreadful folk, winged and crested, heard often in the moonshine, and followed always by a sound as of stabbings and a wild forlorn screaming. Who were they who laughed in the moonshine, and stabbed for joy, and fed upon the screaming terror of strayed men? None knew ; no more than any knew who lit the sudden blazing fires upon treeless hills, or of what

the echoes were that made a dreadful mocking among the hollows in the mountains. One king only survived; but he did not reign. Colla was old and weary. He lived alone, in a raised house of wicker-boughs, at the forest-end of the great lake of Bandore, at whose head was the rath of the King of the North—a rath dishevelled and unfrequented now, save by a feeble, eager folk, for there was no King of the North, nor any feudal kings, save only Colla that was too weary with age and sorrow.

One night Colla sat by the pine-logs, staring through the flame into the past. He heard no sound, but suddenly knew that some one stood by him.

When he looked, startled, he saw a tall woman, taller than any woman he had ever seen, and of a beauty dreadful and wonderful. She was clad in a green robe that hung about her like innumerable little leaves; her eyes were dark and shadowy as forest-pools; but whenever they moved, they had a flame in them as of a windblown torch.

‘Peace be with you,’ said Colla.

The demon laughed.

‘It is not for peace I come, O Colla,’ said the woman; ‘but to play to you upon my heart, that you may have wisdom.’

With that she took her heart out of her breast, and blew the red out of it into a bloody foam, and then played upon the seven strings that were laid bare.

When she had played a brief while she stopped. Her eyes were upon Colla as two wind-spent fires. He rose.

‘I know now what to do, O Woman out of the Woods,’ he said. ‘But where shall I find Bêl the Harper, and where shall I find Ulad the Dreamer, and where shall I find Aithnê his Dream?’

‘You shall hear the harping of Bêl when you speak to the people three days hence at the Rath of Bandore. And there shall be an echo, after Bêl’s playing, which shall tell him where he may find Ulad. But of Aithnê I can tell you nothing, save that she dwells under the rainbow in the west.’

With that the woman turned and went back into the night.

Till dawn Colla sat and dreamed of life and death. He passed into that shadowy realm where memories move with august and mournful eyes. Lordship of men and women, forlorn vicissitudes, dropping decays: thus moved the circuit of his thoughts. He had seen the wheels of fortune—chariot-wheels of a dreadful and unseeing God.

When the morrow came he left his retreat among the reeds of Bandore and went to the rath. There he bade the war-horns be blown, and all the people summoned from far and near: every prince and every warrior and every man who bore a sword or carried spear and bow. All were to assemble there to hear what he had to say, to hear the last words of the last of the kings.

It was a mighty concourse that assembled at noon on that third day. Many sons of kings were there, and great lords. All were weary of an unrulèd realm; the hearts of all were heavy because of the portents, and of the return of the old banished gods, and of the lighting of mysterious fires, and of the obscure congregation of demons, and nocturnal laughter, cries, and prophesyings. So that when Colla said what he had to say, all listened with eagerness. At the close a great shout went up. Even those who held aloof from the revelation of a demon were glàd that a great king should be found to rule over all the northlands of the Gael; and if Ulad lived, there was none better than he, for all that no man there knew more of him than that he bore a great name, and was accounted one of the lords of the world, though where his own kingdom was, and what his people, none knew.

‘But where is he? Where is Ulad the Lonely? Where is Ulad our King?’ the whole assemblage cried as with one voice, when Colla sat back on the golden chair of Bandore.

It was then that a wild, sweet harping was heard.

All turned and looked towards the reedy end of the Lake of Bandore, whence the rumour of the music. Along the path from the west a man walked, harping as he came.

It was Bèl the Harper.

He stopped when he came to the white cliff to the west side of the rath. He stared a long while, for he had seen no such concourse of the people, nor any

•such assemblage of mighty ones, since the day when the Seven Kings of the North lost all, in the great battle beyond the mountains of Doon.

Colla rose, and called to Bêl.

‘Hail, O King. I hear. Glory to our lost land!’

‘Play to us, O Bêl.’

Then Bêl played upon his harp, and he sang. The hearts of all were like running water when he played, and like melted wax before his singing was done.

In the silence that followed his singing, and the marvellous sweet harping whereof the secret was his own, there was heard a strange thing. The music of the stricken strings moved upward like a homing dove seeking her way; or like blue wood-smoke when there is no wind. It moved against the face of the white cliff, clinging wanderingly there with pale, aerial wings of sound, or breaths of invisible song.

A sweet, wild air, incommunicable, delicate as falling dew, stole from the cliff, the fragrance of the spiral music netted among the unseen facets wrought of wind and sun. None knew what it forebode, nor could any there liken the sweet, fantastic rhythm to any rare sounds made by mortal man.

All saw that Bêl the Harper stood as though entranced: for his own harping was the most wonderful since Cravetheen played death into the love of Cormac Conlingas, and the beautiful Eilidh whom he loved so passing well.

‘Speak, Bêl!’ cried Colla: ‘speak! For all may

see that you hear what we cannot hear, in that echo upon the cliff of Bandore.'

Slowly the Harper looked round: slowly he advanced. He spoke no word till he was near the golden chair of the king. 'O king . . . and it is you, Colla of the House of Amergin the Great King, whom I thought dead, as are all other kings in this weary land now, save one. . . . O king, that is no echo that seems an echo up there on the cliff. I know that strange, sweet singing.'

'If it be not an echo, what then is that singing and confused murmur as of reeds in the wind? And where, O B  l, have you heard that strange, sweet singing?'

'I have heard that singing, ay, and that confused murmur as of reeds in the wind, long, long ago, when I was a boy. It was when I had sailed three days and three nights, without food or water, driven seaward on the crest of an endless, wind-harried wave. I did not know then that the land I came to, and lingered in for what may have been a day or a year, or a day of many years, was Hy Br  sil.'

At this a low whisper went from mouth to mouth among all who listened. At last Colla spoke—

'Then, B  l, that sweet music that has now ceased is like unto that which long years ago was sweet against your ears, in the Land of Youth, over-sea?'

'Even so, O king. There is none like it. No man playeth it, no man knoweth it. Only the heroes in Flatheanas hear it: it is like dew upon the grass in Tir-na'n-Og, if that indeed be other than Hy

Bràsil itself. Only those may hear it who put their left ear against the wind at the rising of the moon. The green people know it, and the silent ones whom we see no more, and those who dwell in shadow, and the unremembered gods, and the demons.'

'And there is none that plays it, none that knows it?'

'I have known none save two others than myself. As for me, I play but an echo of it. But I know it.'

'And the two others?'

'One was Cravetheen the Harper, whose soul is with the demons because of the fiery death he wrought upon Cormac Conlingas, and upon the beauty of Eilidh. His soul now is a torn harp whereon demons play when they see beauty debased or destroyed. That is the sin of sins, O king: to destroy beauty.'

'And the other?'

'The other is Ulad the Dreamer, him whom I have sung of so often, Ulad the Lonely. And by the same token, it is of Ulad and no other that the swarm of music on the cliff was.'

'Tell us the hidden word. Speak without fear. As for me, I reign here only until the Ardree, the High King, shall come.'

'The singing was like this: though my words, O Colla, are as bats after the brown birds that sing in the night. . . .

"In the wild westlands
Of Alba the foam-swept,
Awaiteth your High King,
I'predestined, and worthy.

Ulad his name is,
 Ulad the Lonely :
 And great is the fame of him,
 A King from his birthtide,
 A King among warriors.
 Call him to rule ye,
 O people of Eri,
 Lest evils unnumbered
 Pursue ye still further,
 Till camp-fires and dûns
 And green raths in green places
 Are few in all Eri
 As heroes and kings are !”

When Bêl the Harper ceased, all there gave a great shout.

Swords leapt into the air.

‘Ulad ! Ulad !’ all cried. ‘Go hence, O Bêl, and bring back Ulad the King to reign over us.’

Thereupon Colla stepped forward.

‘Hearken, O Bêl, and all ye warriors and folk. I, Colla the King, hold peace here until that day when Ulad the King shall return with Bêl the Harper to be Ardree of all the northlands of the Gael, from the two seas and the waist of Eri, to the coasts of Alba and the Isles of the North’

And so it was.

III

For the three years which followed the coming of Ulad to Bandore, there was peace in all the lands of the north.

The tributary kings laid aside their swords: the spear and the arrow, save in the fray of the hunt,

quenched no longer their red thirst. Everywhere blue smoke ascended, from the great straths, from the shore-combes, from inland valleys, from the woodlands. The green corn grew to a yellow harvest: the aftermath was filled with peace, and without rumour of battles and dissensions. Winter, spring, summer; the white to the brown, the brown to the yellow, the yellow to the green, the green to the russet: each season came and went, orderly, glad, welcome.

In the forest townships and the great raths on the plain the people grew slowly to the likeness of Ulad. The ollavs preached a life of peace and fair deeds; the poets sang of the great past, and of heroes, and of beautiful women, and of the passion of life, and in the songs of one and all was the beauty of dream.

Long, long afterward, this time was sung of as the golden age.

With longing eyes many a dreamer has turned upon it his backward gaze, fain of a day when men and women loved and had joy, in great peace, and to the charmed music of dream.

Yet even in that day the loneliness of Ulad became a proverb.

All men rejoiced save Ulad the King.

He dwelt solitary, the strange poet. In vain men praised him for great deeds: in vain the bards sang of his own sweet harping, exceeding that of Bêl himself; in vain women offered him white arms, the beating heart, soft eyes of flame.

Of his great deeds he held small account, and was

weary of the idle rumour of such things ; because all his heart yearned for the one great love he dreamed of. And little solace for him was any singing of bards or soft playing of harps and reed flutes, who had by day and by night a lovelier, a more wild, a more haunting music in the lonely glens and wide, desolate, shadowy straths of his mind. Tall women, gracious, sweet, beautiful, with these he might have had joy ; but ever since he had slain Fand with his will, he could seek no love of any woman. There was but one woman in the world for him ; and of her he knew only silence and memory.

Bél the Harper alone knew the story of the love of Ulad.

IV

And this is that tale.

In the spring of the year that followed the passing of Fand, Ulad the Lonely reached a great fjord in the remote north of Alba. There he met Aithné, the woman of whom he had dreamed. She was the daughter of a lord of the north isles, Cormac of the Rocks, so called because he had his dún on the summit of the midmost of three great heights at the south end of a green and lovely island.

Aithné Ulad loved from the hour when he first saw her. She was tall, and fleet as a roe, and lovely as the sun-dazzle on the sea. Her dusky hair waved over a face of so great a beauty that Ulad's heart ached because of it. Dark, curving eyebrows made

a lovely twilight above her eyes, which were of a lustrous grey-green hazel, like the sunlit green hollow of a wave over sand, though often they darkened with a soft, dewy dusk, wonderful to see. Her flowerlike face was as that of Deirdrê or Grainne or Blanid, only more full of dream and ecstasy even than hers whose eyes lit the death of Naois, more fair and exceeding sweet than that of her for whom Diarmid gave up all, more sad with extreme of joy than that of her before whom a man's life passed in flame. Yes, Ulad thought, she had the surpassing beauty of that Eilidh, queen of women, with whom Isla the Singer swam forth, at the dawn following a disastrous day, swam forth, seaward, against the sunrise. And she was fair and wild and dreamlike as was Fand, whom he had wrought out of white and red flowers gathered at the base of a rainbow in Hy Bràsil.

And Aithnê? She loved Ulad. All of her life went out to him. He was her lord, her prince, her singer of songs, her dreamer of dreams, her hero, her king.

The hour came when at last he spoke. It was at dusk, by a glade, overagainst the running wave. Words swam into hearing, and drowned in passionate silence. Each came to each as two flames that become one.

Later he told her of Fand. Then he spoke of Eilidh, whom his kinsman Isla the Singer had loved and won, and made a deathless memory among men because of her queenlihood of beauty and

the extreme mighty reach and wonder of their love.

'And lo,' he whispered at the last, 'Fand was indeed but a dream—the idle foam on the running wave of my dream. But thou—thou, Aithnê, art my dream itself.'

She sighed, and pressed her heart against his. He heard her voice as one may hear drops trickling through the moss beside the surge and roar of a mountain-torrent.

'And thou, Ulad . . . thou art Ulad!'

In the beating heart of silence that followed they lived, in a shadow-fleeting moment, all life. Then, abruptly, the boughs of a low, spreading oak parted. A man stepped forth. It was Olg, son of the brother of Cormac of the Rocks.

He cast his dark, frowning eyes upon Aithnê, but did not look at Ulad, though the words he spoke were for him.

'The yellow-haired men are upon us,' he said simply.

Ulad withdrew his claspt hand from that of Aithnê. Then, suddenly, he stooped his head, and put his lips upon the white flower he had held. Olg moved forward soundlessly.

With the point of his spear he drew blood from his arm and let it drop into the hollow of his right hand. This, still speaking no word, he spilled between Aithnê and Ulad. With a bloody finger he touched the breast of Ulad.

Aithnê drew back, pale. But her eyes flamed.

Ulad stood for a moment, pondering. Then he stooped, and took Aithné's hands in his, and kissed her on the lips.

'So be it, Olg, son of Olg,' he said.

Thuswise Ulad and Aithné parted, knowing that Olg had put a feud to the death between himself and Ulad, and had spilled blood to be a widening gulf for ever betwixt him and Aithné. On the morrow the men would meet. Now it was night, and the yellow-haired men were come.

At the rising of the moon, swords and spears sang their wild song. Deep thirst was theirs, and none went forth of that dreadful Battle of the Rising Moon unquenched.

A grey dawn, streaked with red, as though tattered banners flaunted above invisible skyey armies met in war, brought an end to a strife which by moor and hillside and shore had endured till the stars swam pale and sank drowned in light.

The yellow-haired northmen were everywhere : but they were still now. On the heather, beside granite boulders, on the wave-splashed white rocks, their motionless bodies lay, no battle-song upon their lips, no fire in their blue eyes. The sunrise turned their locks into pale gold, and put a faint bloom against the whiteness of their faces. Neither thoughts nor desires were behind these silent brows, but only the iron of the spear-head or the adder tongue of the feathered arrow. They slept well, these warriors.

The tide of battle had already ebbed for Lochlin when, at the first greying of the dark, a fleet of thirty

galleys had come from the north of the island and taken the Vikings by surprise. Their wave-riders were driven ashore, and only two escaped, and these only because of a slight mist that drifted here and there upon the sea.

An ebbing tide, for sure ; but a tide that bore with it a mighty tribute to the valour of the men of Lochlin. Cormac of the Rocks, and his five sons, and most of his blood-kin with more than ten score of his clansmen, fell in that Battle of the Rising Moon. There was thrice a time when all would have been lost but for the might and voice of Ulad. It was on that field he won his name, the Brother of Death.

When all was over, Ulad sought Aithnè. Nowhere in or near the great dùn of Cormac, nor in the rath by the inland loch, was there any trace of the daughter of the king. For three days and three nights men searched like hounds every cave, every glen, every corrie, passing from tree to tree in the woods, from boulder to boulder upon the hills : but vainly.

There were many island galleys lying deep in the green water besides those of the Vikings, but in none of these was the body of Olg found, nor was it traced elsewhere. For he, too, had disappeared. In all, among the slain and wounded and whole, among all who dwelt upon the island, there were nine missing—Aithnè and Olg and seven men of his own following.

It was feared that, caught in a disastrous ebb of battle, Olg had tried to escape, and sought to save Aithnè, but that one of the Viking galleys had run

them down. The prowling things of the sea would have them now.

Only Ulad knew in his heart that Aithné was alive. Could death come to her, and he not know it? Would not every leaping nerve cry out with the knowledge?

That Olg had fled with her he felt sure: but whither? What way do the wild swans fly when they have left behind them the green seas of the Pole?

Week after week passed. Not a trace of the missing ones was found, not the faintest rumour came from any of the isles or the mainland.

For six months, and till the very heart of winter, Ulad spared not one single day to rest. To each and every of the isles he sailed, and along the wild coasts of Alba, from the Cape of Storms to where the foam whitens along the Moyle. Then when the first breath of spring blew soft across the snow on the hills and the drifting ice on the lochs, he set sail by the unknown sea-ways to the north isles of the Normen, and afterwards to Lochlin itself.

At the end of a year from the Battle of the Rising Moon he knew nothing further of Aithné. Nowhere had he found a trace of the fugitives: from no man in any land, neither from Gael nor Pict nor Northman, had he heard one word of the beautiful daughter of Cormac of the Rocks, nor yet of Olg the Swarthy. Nevertheless he knew that Aithné lived.

That summer no one of his people or following

saw Ulad, no nor for two years thereafter. But in all lands he journeyed, harping and singing, though there was only one song on his lips, that which lay below all songs he sang, the song of his desire: and only one music in his heart, that of the beauty of Aithnê, of his deathless dream.

When the third spring came shining out of cloud-woven blue and along the wet green sprays of the larches, Ulad returned to Alba. His heart was weary, but still he failed not in his quest.

With the first heats of summer he grew faint and despairing. The beauty of the world whispered night and day of her whose beauty was to him his star, his joy, his strength, his dream, his life.

One gloaming, as he moved through the woods at the end of the great Loch of Fionn, abruptly he stood still, the blood leaping from his heart and striking swift, heavy blows against his brain. Before him on the shore was a man, crouching beside a fire, and singing to himself as he watched the deer-meat catch the flame. And the song that he sang was one Ulad himself had wrought, and sang to Aithnê, and made it hers because she and no other was worthy of the name Heart o' Beauty.

'O where are thy white hands, Heart o' Beauty?

Heart o' Beauty!

They are as white foam on the swept sands,

Heart o' Beauty!

They are as white swans over dusky lands,

They are wands, magic wands, thy white hands,

Heart o' Beauty!

From the white dawn till the grey dusk,
Heart o' Beauty !
I hear the unseen waves of unseen strands,
Heart o' Beauty !
I see the sun rise and set over shadowy lands,
But never, never, never thy white hands, thy white hands,
Heart o' Beauty !'

Trembling, wrought with a great fear, a greater hope, Ulad soundlessly drew near.

The man sprang to his feet, startled. He had heard a dry twig crackle. When he saw Ulad he let his spear droop to his side.

'I will do you no harm,' said Ulad slowly, 'but I will know one thing of you.'

'That I see well,' the man answered; 'and as for the thing you desire to know, speak.'

'It is this. When and where and from whom heard you that song?'

'I heard it from the lips of Derg son of Teig son of Derg of the Three Fords. It was at a place not far from here, near the grianán on the west shore of the sea-loch known as the Haven of the Foray. It is where, as Ból the Harper sings, Ulad the Poet-King wooed the woman Fand that he wrought out of red and white flowers, and where she died as a plucked flower dies.'

'And what of Ulad?'

'He loved overmuch. And so he too died.'

'Is he dead, in truth?'

'So men say. Nevertheless he died not by the grianán where Fand laughed at his pain, as some of the singers have it. For I have heard from Derg

son of Teig, who gave me that song, that Ulad the Lonely came to his death among the far isles of the north after the Battle of the Rising Moon, wherein Cormac of the Rocks and most of his kinship were slain.'

'And when was it that that Derg son of Teig gave this song to you?'

'On the night of the new moon: and the moon is now sickle-shaped again.'

Ulad's heart beat, and he stared at the man strangely.

'Your name?' he said at last.

'Coran, who also am called Coran-Cù because of my fleetness.'

At that Ulad drew from his belt a blade, hilted with amber.

'Take this, Coran the Hound, and keep it in memory of me, who am Ulad the Lonely, for it is great news you have given me this day.'

Coran made an obeisance, and looked with wondering eyes at the face of him whose name was in so many songs of love and battle.

'Tell me, Coran, of this Derg son of Teig.'

'He was one of those who escaped after the Battle of the Rising Moon. Some say every islander died in that great fight, save only the few who fled with Olg son of Olg the Blind, brother of Cormac of the Rocks. All were drowned off an unknown shore, save only Derg and Olg and Aithné, daughter of Cormac of the Rocks.'

Ulad leaned forward as a sleuth-hound leans when

the smell on the track grows keen. His eyes were on fire with blue flame of hope.

‘And—and—Aithnê—Olg and Aithnê—are they—were they also at the Haven of the Foray?’

‘No. Derg lay there, because of his wound. Aithnê came with him and seven other men from where she lived with Olg the Swarthy, a king of some land now, I know not where. She came there to die, because from the songs of the poets she knew that was where Ulad, whom she loved, blew into dead blossoms the flower that was Fand. Of a truth, she may have hoped to meet you again, O Ulad, for it is said you are not of those whose dust is in the earth.’

‘And then?’

‘Then Olg pursued her, and came to the Haven of the Foray, and called upon her to come back to him, being his wife. But she answered that though her body had been made bondager to him, she was free, and loved Ulad only, and that, too, whether he was in life or in death. Moreover, she swore by the sun and by the wind that if Olg sought her further, she would slay herself.

“Mayst thou not love two men, Aithnê?” Olg cried, for he was fain of her whom he had made his wife.

“Rather should I know death,” she answered. “There is but one love, that which passeth all else, and that is as life itself. It is Ulad I love, and I am no man’s henceforth, nay, though Ulad my king were now but as wind-harried dust.”

“Ulad is dead, O Aithnê,” Olg cried again, taking the death-oath by the moon.

‘But Aithn  would not hearken to his plea. She said these words: “If he be living still, I shall find my King. If he be dead, my King awaiteth me. There is but one love.”

‘It was then that Olg strove to land and take back Aithn , whom he had made his wife. But Derg and those with him fought for the fair daughter of Cormac—Heart o’ Beauty, as you yourself have called her, O Ulad. And in that strife Olg was driven back, weak with open wounds, and stricken unto death. Aithn , with the three men who had not been slain, save Derg, who was left as one dead, sailed westward.’

Here Coran stopped, as though he had no more to say. But  lad bore hardly upon him, and he told all. He had come upon Derg, and had comforted his wound. And Derg had told him how on the morrow he had seen a galley drifting by, bottom upward, and thus knew that Aithn  and her company had seen death in the hollow of a wave. Thereafter he had waited with Derg a while, and it was from him he learned that song. Then a shadow had grown through Derg, and he died.

Ulad bowed his head. His hope was as a wounded bird that flutters on the ground.

Nevertheless he remembered what Aithn  had said, and was glad. But all he said was this: ‘Truly, O Coran, there is but one love. All else is but a shadow.’ Only to himself he whispered—

‘If she be living still, I shall find my Queen. If she be dead, my Queen awaiteth me. There is but one love.’

From that day, dreaming his dream, Ulad the Lonely forgot war and the seat of wisdom and the commune of the homestead and rath and dún, and dwelled only with his thoughts and dreams by the grianán on the Haven of the Foray. And so until the day when Bél the Harper came and led him forth to be High King of all the northlands of the Gáel.

V

It was, indeed, a great and wonderful peace that was upon all northern Gaeldom during the three years when Ulad was High King. All things moved orderly, and to fair and noble issues. But the King knew sorrow: deep sorrow brooded in his heart throughout every hour of every day, whether he hunted in the woods or on the hills, or trained the young men in the noble and chivalrous life of the sword and of peace, or sat in council, or listened to the bards or to the mysteries of those who were the servants of the gods, or moved or ate or rested, or himself played upon the harp, or wandered alone, or dwelled solitary in memories: and in sorrow each night he closed his eyes.

For there is but one love.

Of what avail the glory of the king unto the King himself? Had he not but one glory: Aithnê? Had he not but one desire: Aithnê? Had he not but one joy, one hope, one peace?

There came a day when a rumour reached him that far in the southland of Eri a most fair and

wonderful queen lived with a great prince, Artân, and that she was the daughter of a dead king of the isles. The man who brought the rumour said that she was called Aithnê.

Ulad pondered a while. Then he knew that Aithnê could not be that queen, for she would have come to him. There is but one love.

Nevertheless, he sent Bêl the Harper into the southlands, and bade him bring word of this queen.

At the third rising of the moon after he left, Bel's harp once more made music in Bandore. It was true that the wife of Artân was called Aithnê, and that she was fair and comely and gracious. But her beauty beside that of Aithnê whom Ulad loved was as the wan face of February beside the glory of June.

And so it went till the third year of Ulad's overlordship was gone. On the morrow of the fourth year, the elders among the men of rank, and the priests, and the bards, came to him with a prayer. And that prayer was that he would take unto himself a queen. Every fair woman that was unwed would gladly be wife to Ulad; and there were in that day seven women so beautiful beyond all others that they were sung of by the bards as the seven roses of Gaeldom.

Ulad listened to what they had to say. When they ceased, he spoke—

‘There is no woman in all the lands of the Gael whose eyes can dim for me the beauty of the eyes of Aithnê, daughter of Cormac of the Rocks, and for

whom year after year I have waited, famished. My dream stayeth me.'

'Nevertheless, O Ulad,' they urged, 'the Aithnê of your love is surely dead long since. Out of a thousand beautiful women, surely there is one you would have to wife. Pluck whomso you will of the Seven Roses of the Gael. Nay, if your heart is set upon it, lead us to war against this Artân, King in the Southland, and take unto yourself his queen Aithnê, who may yet prove to be her whom you have lost.'

'There is but one love,' answered Uíad, and turned wearily from those who spoke. Straightway thereafter he went into the forest behind the great dún of Bandore, and dwelled there with his ancient sorrow and bitter unquenched thirst of desire till the dews lay cool upon his brows, and the stars filled the night with solemn signals of wild, impossible, unrelinquished dreams. At the last, the dawn came, rose-red and grey. Then he returned to his own place, and to the weary glory of the king, and to his ancient sorrow and the bitter unquenched thirst of his inappeasable desire.

One eve the aged Colla came to him.

'Ulad,' he said after a long silence, 'I too have known the dark crown of sorrow. I too have been a king. And I am old now with the exceeding heavy burden of the years. It is thus, mayhap, that I can see into your heart. I see dark lonely sorrow there. But this I see also, that you are a king, and will do wearily, but yet will do, what you have to do.'

'Listen, Colla of the White Hair. When I was young I sojourned a while with the greatest prince among the princes of men. It was oversea, in the land of the Kymry. And when I bade him farewell, I asked him to put his hands upon me and wish me the one thing I should need. He wished me neither happiness, nor great fortune, nor fame, nor victory in war, nor love of women, nor great wisdom, nor song, nor the dream of the dreamer; but what he said unto me was this—"O Dreamer of dreams, this wish shall I wish thee: Strength to endure until the end." And so, Colla of the White Hair, I bethink me often of the saying of that prince among men.'

At that, Colla went away comforted somewhat. Yet in his heart he knew that Ulad's hour was moving swift across some far-off hill or through deep forests.

He turned to speak to the king once more. But Ulad was staring against the west, his eyes filled with the glory of his dream.

From that day, nevertheless, a growing weakness came upon the High King. Yet was it no weakness of the body; for when Balba, the lord of Tyr-Connla, the tallest and strongest of all the princes in Gaeldom, openly in anger struck his wife Malv, Ulad seized him by the waist and whirled him above his head and dashed him upon the ground. 'Eat dust, thou dog who strikest a woman,' he cried; but to deaf ears, for Balba had already fared to a dim shadowy land whence none could hear the thin falling echo of his perishing cry of wrath.

• The Festival of Peace was nigh, and all men made ready to rejoice. On the lips of every bard throughout the realms of the north was the glory of the King. All dreamed of a mighty kingdom yet to be. But Ulad dreamed only of a kingdom beyond the Rainbow.

One yellow wane of day, in the fall of the leaf, Ulad sat in a great carved chair outside the dún. Not one of those who were about him spoke. All saw that the King dreamed his dream. Bêl the Harper had been playing upon the harp. In the dim land of sound all there had followed lovely desires. Ulad longed with ancient sorrow, with bitter unquenched thirst of the aching heart.

Bêl slowly struck the strings once more. Abruptly he ceased. All looked at him. The eyes of the bard were fixed upon one, clad in green, who came slowly out of the wood.

When he drew near, he played low upon the small harp that he carried. None stirred, because of the sweetness of what he played. Only Bêl sighed, and Ulad's eyes darkened.

It was but the song of a bird in the moonshine: sweet as that, brief as that. But when the green harper had ceased playing, Bêl rose, and threw his own harp from him, and bowed his head. Then, raising it, he looked at Ulad.

'The Hour waits, O King,' he said.

But Ulad made no answer. His shadow-haunted eyes wavered not in their intent gaze upon him who had come out of the forest, and was known of no

man, and had a strange light upon his face that came from within, and whose faint smile brought to him dim memories of splashing waves and the salt weedy smell of island shores.

‘The Hour is come, O King,’ said Bêl the Harper once more. But even while he spoke, the green harper played.

At that playing, all who heard passed into the shadowy land of dream. Some beheld joy, and dallied with it; some peace, and wooed it; some love, some honour, some fortune. Strong men sat brooding, heedless of the sword, idle to the hunter’s horn, recking only to the song of deep delight, of deeper peace, of a dream within a dream. In the heart of women tears and longings subsided in a spray of mist, and out of that mist came white doves and lovely rainbow-hued phantoms of desire. There was silence upon every bush, upon every tree. Not a bird moved. Each little brown breast quivered. The wild deer in the forest stood, with one hoof lifted; the fawns trembled like aspens, for all their life had ebbed into their liquid wondering eyes. The fox blinked drowsily among the oak-roots. There was dream upon every living thing.

Bêl the Harper died in that hour. He beheld again his youth, and he died. He only of all men save Ulad might know, might understand, the secret song that the green harper played. And in sooth he knew. The smile was on his lips still, when, unseen of all there, who saw but his body prone on the grass, he was moving swift through a flowery glade

in Tir-na'n-Og, radiant again in the exceeding sweet beauty of youth, and calling, calling, calling a woman's name with a sobbing joy.

And Ulad . . . he, too, heard, understood. In that playing he saw the sweet phantom of the face of Aithnê, heard the far echo of her calling voice.

None saw him go. That which was in the golden chair did not stir; nevertheless, Ulad rose and passed before all there. The green harper smiled, and moved before him into the forest. They fared onward, and left the forest glooms and went over the shoulder of the smooth green hill, facing the west.

Beyond, the whole land and distant sea lay in a haze of golden vapour. Gloriously aflame, a rainbow builded itself superbly against the vast precipitous cloud-cliffs behind.

Under the rainbow Ulad walked, with glad eager eyes.

'Behold thy kingdom, Ulad,' said a voice beside him, a voice so passing sweet that his spirit moved unto the depth of life. He looked, thinking to behold the shining eyes of the harper. It was the face of Aithnê, the voice of Aithnê, the hand of Aithnê.

'Aithnê!' he cried.

She put her arms about him, and kissed him on the lips.

'If he be living still, I shall find my King,' she whispered. 'There is but one love.'

It was then that Colla the White, leaning above the cold face of Ulad where he sat white and still in the great chair of the Ardree, and looking into the deep quiet of the now untroubled eyes, raised his withered shaking hands, and in a great voice called through the death-foam on his lips, 'Behold! the Glory of the King!'

THE CRYING OF WIND

AFTER the great and terrible battle of the Field of Spears, Aodh the Harper, who was called ¹ Aodh-of-the-Songs, left the camps of men and went into the woods.

For a year and another season of snow he drifted hither and thither therein, a blown leaf. When he was seen again of his scattered folk, his brown hair was grey, and his eyes were as a woman's tired with weeping, and as a young man's weary with vain love, and as an old man's weary with life.

He came forth clad in a slit deerskin, and in his long grey locks were sprays of mistletoe, the moon-white berries like river-pearls in the grey ashes of his hair. Behind him lolled two gaunt wolves, staring ever upward at him with famished eyes.

When he came before the King, where Congal the Silent sat in his rath, talking with Barach the blind Druid, he stood still, looking out from his eyes as a man on a hill staring through the dusk at once familiar lands.

Congal looked at him.

'This is a good day that we see you again, Aodh-of-the-Songs.'

¹ *Aodh* is pronounced as the letter *Y*.

Aodh said nothing.

'It is a year and a fourth part of a year since you went into the forest and were lost there as a shadow is lost.'

Aodh answered nothing.

'In all that time have you known what we have not known?'

Aodh stirred and looked intently upon the king and upon the white hair and white face of Barach the Blind. Then he looked at the two gaunt wolves at his side, and he smiled.

'Ay, Congal, son of Artan, I have seen and I have heard.'

'And what will you have seen, and what heard?'

'I have heard the crying of wind.'

'That, too, we have heard. What is there in the crying of the wind that we have not heard?'

'I have heard the sigh of the grass.'

'That, too, we have heard. What is there in the sigh of the grass that we have not heard?'

'I have seen the dew falling from the stars, and like pale smoke the dew rising again to the stars, till they were wet and bright as the scales of a salmon leaping in the moonshine.'

'That also we have seen, Aodh-of-the-Harp.'

'I have seen the coming and going of the stars.'

'That also we have seen, Aodh.'

'There is no more.'

'Is there in truth no more to tell?'

'Only the crying of wind.'

Congal the King sat in his place with brooding

eyes. Aodh stood before him, seeing that which he had seen between the coming and going of stars.

‘Play to us, Aodh-of-the-Woods.’

Then Aodh took his harp and touched the strings, and sang—

‘I have fared far in the dim woods ;
And I have known sorrow and grief,
And the incalculable years
That haunt the solitudes.
Where now are the multitudes
Of the Field of Spears?
Old tears
Fall upon them as rain,
Their eyes are quiet under the brown leaf.

I have seen the dead, innumeros :
I too shall lie thus,
And thou, Congal, thou too shalt lie
Still and white
Under the starry sky,
And rise no more to any Field of Spears,
But, under the brown leaf,
Remember grief
And the old, salt, bitter tears.

And I have heard the crying of wind.
It is the crying that is in my heart :
Oona of the Dark Eyes, Oona of the Dark Eyes,
Oona, Oona, Oona, Heart of my Heart !
But there is only the crying of wind
Through the silences of the sky,
Dews that fall and rise,
The faring of long years,
And the coverlet of the brown leaf
For the old familiar grief
And the old tears.’

No man spoke when Aodh ceased singing and harping. All knew that when he had come back to

the smoking, wasted rath of the King, after the Battle of the Field of Spears, he had found Oona of the Dark Eyes, whom he loved, slain with a spear betwixt the breasts. He had looked long upon her, but said nothing; and when that night she was put in the brown earth, white-robed, with white blooms in her dusky hair, standing erect and proud as though she saw wise eyes fixed upon her, he made a song and a music for her, and then was silent till dawn. No man had heard so strange and wild music, and never had any listened to a song wherein the words clang'd and clashed heedlessly as the din of falling swords. On the morrow, Duach, a druid, had graven her name on a stone in Ogam. Aodh had stood by from dawn till the rising of the sun. Then he laughed low, and smoothed the stone with his hand, and whispered, 'Come, White One, come.' With that he passed into the woods.

On this day of his return he had gone straightway to the stone in the oak glade. 'I come, White One, I come,' he whispered there, smoothing the white stone with a slow lingering hand.

When Aodh had turned thence to the rath, and was brought before Congal the Ardrigh, there was a shining in his face.

All knew what Aodh had sung of when he sang that song of grief at the bidding of the King. Thus it was that no man spoke. There was silence while slowly, as òne in a dream, he touched now one string of his harp, now another.

Suddenly it was as though he awoke.

'Where are my three hounds?' he asked,
Congal looked at him with grave eyes.

'Great was your love, Aodh. None ever had greater love for a woman than was your love for Oona the Beautiful. But great sorrow has put a mist against your eyes.'

'I hear the crying of wind, Congal.'

'Ay?'

'And fair is the moon that I see sailing white and wonderful among the stars.'

'There is no star yet but the Star of Fionn, and there is no moon, Aodh-of-the-Songs.'

'Fair is the moon that I see sailing white and wonderful among the stars. Ah, white wonderful face of Beauty! Oona, Oona, Oona!'

The King was silent. None spoke.

'I hear the crying of wind, Congal.'

'Ay?'

'Where are my three hounds, O King?'

'There were two wolves which came out of the forest with you—a wolf and a she-wolf. They are gone.'

'There were three.'

None answered.

'There were three, O King. And now one only abides with me.'

'I see none, Aodh-of-the-Songs.'

'There were three hounds with me, Congal, son of Artan. They are called Death, and Life, and Love.'

'Two wolves only I saw.'

'I hear the crying of wind, Congal the Silent.'

'Ay?'

'In that crying I hear the baying of the two wolves whom ye saw. They are Death and Life. They roam the dark wood.'

'Is there a wolf or a hound here now, Aodh-of-the-Songs?'

Aodh answered nothing, for his head was sideway, and he listened, as a hart at a well.

Barach the Blind rose and spoke.

'There is a white hound beside him, O King.'

'Is it the hound Love?'

'It is the hound Love.'

There was silence. Then the King spoke.

'What is it that you hear, Aodh-of-the-Songs?'

'I hear the crying of wind.'

EPILOGUE

' Thus begins another vigil, that of the singers in God's acre.'

The Shadow of Arvor.

' The will of God is in the wind.'

Santez Anna.

' The Wind and Silence, God's eldest born.'

(' The Book of the Opal.')

EPILOGUE

THE WIND, THE SHADOW, AND THE SOUL

THERE are dreams beyond the thrust of the spear, and there are dreams and dreams ; of what has been or what is to be, as well as the more idle fantasies of sleep. And this, perhaps, is of those dreams whose gossamer is spun out of the invisible threads of sorrow ; or it may be, is woven out of the tragic shadows of unfulfilled vicissitude. It is of little moment.

One who was, now is not. That 'is the sting, the wonder.'

One who was, now is not. The soul and the shadow have both gone away upon the wind.

I write this in a quiet sea-haven. Tall cliffs half enclose it, in two white curves, like the wings of the solander when she hollows them as she breasts the north wind.

These sun-bathed cliffs, with soft hair of green grass, against whose white walls last year the swallows, dusky arrowy shuttles, slid incessantly, and where tufts of sea-lavender hung like breaths of stilled smoke, now seem to me merely tall cliffs. Then,

when we were together, they were precipices which fell into seas of dream, and at their bases was for ever the rumour of a most ancient, strange, and penetrating music. It is I only, now, who do not hear: doubtless, in those ears, it fashions new meanings, mysteries, and beauty: there, where the music deepens beyond the chime of the hours, and Time itself is less than the whisper of the running wave. White walls, which could open, and where the sea-song became a spirit, still with the foam-bells on her hair, but with a robe green as grass, and in her hand a white flower.

Symbols: yes. To some, foolish; to others clear as the noon, the clearness that is absolute in light, that is so obvious, and is unfathomable.

Last night the wind suddenly smote the sea. There had been no warning. The sun had set beneath narrow peninsulas of lemon and pale mauve; overagainst the upper roseate glow, the east was a shadowy opal wilderness, with one broad strait of luminous green wherein a star trembled. At the furtive suffusion of the twilight from behind the leaves, a bat, heedless of the season, flittered through the silent reaches; and when it too was lost in the obscurity, and darkness was silence and silence darkness, the continuous wave upon the shore was but the murmurous voice of that monotony. Three hours later a strange confused sound was audible. At midnight there was a sudden congregation of voices; a myriad scream tore the silence; the whole sea was uplifted, and it was as though the whirling body

of the tide was rent therefrom and flung upon the land.

I did not sleep, but listened to the wind and sea. My dreams and thoughts, children of the wind, were but ministers of a mind wrought in shadow. They did 'the will of beauty and regret.'

At dawn the tempest was over. But for an hour thereafter the sea was in a shroud of scud and spray: I could see nothing but this shimmering, dreadful whiteness.

Why do I write this? It is because in this past night of tempest, in this day of calm, I have come close to one of whom I speak, and would image in this after-breath, as a sudden fragrance of violets in an unexpected place, a last fragrance of memory. Yet, I would not have written these last words to this book if it were not for the keen resurrection of my sorrow in the very haven of to-day's noontide.

I was in a hollow in the eastern cliff, a hollow filled with pale blue shadow, and with a faint sea-rumour clinging invisibly to the flint bosses and facets of the sun-warmed chalk. Before me rose gradually a grass-green path, aslant upon the upward slope. There was absolute stillness in the air. The trouble of the waters made this landward silence as peace within peace.

Out of the blue serenities, where nothing, not even the moving whiteness of a vanishing wing, was visible; out of the heat and glory of the day; out of that which is beyond—an eddy of wind swiftly descended. I saw the grasses shiver along the green

path. A few broken sprays and twigs whirled this way and that. In my own land this has one open meaning. Those invisible ones whom we call the hidden people—whom so many, instinctively ever reducing what is great to what is small, what is of mystery and tragic wonder to what is fantastic and unthinkable, call 'the fairies'—have passed by.

There are too many who inhabit the world that from our eyes is hidden, for us to know who pass, in times, on occasions like this. The children of light and darkness tread the same way. But to-day it was not one of those unseen and therefore unfamiliar kindred.

For when I looked again, I saw that the one whom I had lost moved slowly up the path; but not alone. Behind, or close by, moved another. It was this other who turned to me. The image stooped, and lifted a palmful of dust in the hollow of its hand. This it blew away with a little sudden breath; and I saw that it was not the shadow, nor the phantom, but the soul of that which I had loved. Yet my grief was for that sweet perished mortality when I saw the eddy-spiralled greying dust was all that remained.

But for a second I had seen them together, so much one, so incommunicably alien. In that moment of farewell, all that was of mortal beauty passed into the starry eyes of the comrade who had forgotten the little infinite change. It was then, it was thus, I saw Eternity. That is why I write.

Then, as a film of blue smoke fades into the sky, what I had seen was not ; and the old bewilderment was mine again, and I knew not which was the Shadow or which the Soul, or whether it was but the Wind which had thus ceased to be.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Most of the contents of this book are printed for the first time. 'The White Heron' (which relates the earlier story of Mary Maclean in my first book, Pharais) is revised from the version which appeared, with illustrations, in the Christmas number of Harper's (1898): 'Children of the Dark Star' appeared in The Dome, fifth quarterly issue, May 1898: 'The Wells of Peace' in Good Words in September 1898: and 'Enya of the Dark Eyes' in Literature, in the autumn 1898. 'The Herdsman' is a re-written and materially altered version of the Hebridean part of Green Fire, of which book it is all that I care to preserve. The first of the five parts of 'Ulad of the Dreams' has been already printed as 'The Melancholy of Ulad,' a translation of which ('La Tristesse d'Ulad') appeared in L'Humanité Nouvelle of November last; while the Chant to Fand in it has been set to music by M. Edmond Bailly. A passage on p. 216 has been reprinted from an earlier and cancelled story in The Washer of the Ford. The reader interested in the fast disappearing St. Brigit (St. Bride) customs alluded to in 'By the Yellow Moonrock' will find a full and authentic account in Mr. Alexander Carmichael's shortly forthcoming Or agus Ob, to which, through a friend, I am indebted for the rare Gaelic verses and one or two points of detail.

One or two of the contents of The Dominion of Dreams will be included in the forthcoming French translation of representative tales selected from The Sin-Eater and The Washer of the Ford, by M. Henry D. Davray (Mercure de France).

THE WRITINGS OF MISS FIONA MACLEOD

'Of these new voices none is more typical than the curious, mysterious voice that is revealed in these stories of Miss Fiona Macleod. . . . Miss Macleod sees everything with the eyes of the personages of her tales, and they have not any dream too extravagant, any passion too wild, any hope too impossible, for her heart to be in it as though there had never been any other dream, any other passion, any other hope in the world. . . . These three books [the *Collected Shorter Tales*, in three volumes] are constantly almost perfect of their kind. . . . She has become the voice (of these primitive peoples and elemental things) not from mere observation of their ways, but out of an absolute identity of nature. . . . Her art belongs in kind, whatever be its excellence in its kind, to a greater art, which is of revelation, and deals with invisible and impalpable things. Its mission is to bring us near to those powers and principalities, which we divine in mortal hopes and passions.'—**W. B. Yeats** (in an article in *The Sketch* on the *Collected Shorter Tales*).

'Where it is the spirit and the dreams of the Gael more than his outward life that are her themes, she is on ground where few could come near her. Any uncertainty we might have had about the best direction of her great talents is gone entirely. She knows her way about, and with her certainty has come an enormous increase of artistic power.'—**A. Macdonell** (in *The Bookman*).

'In power of treatment, in the force imaginative realism of some of them, and the profound depth of sadness or bitterness in others, these writings bear fresh witness to the genius which most of her critics have recognised in Miss Macleod's work.'—**George Cotterell** (in *The Academy*).

'Not beauty alone, but that element of strangeness in beauty which Mr. Pater rightly discerned as the inmost spirit of romantic art—it is this which gives to Miss Macleod's work its peculiar æsthetic charm. . . . Of the products of what has been called the Celtic Renaissance, *The Sin-Eater* and *The Washer of the Ford* seem to us the most remarkable. They are of imagination and a certain terrible beauty all compact. . . . "There is no mystery in them, or anywhere, except the eternal mystery of beauty"—and Miss Macleod certainly possesses the master-key to the heart of that mystery. What a world of strange significance and beauty is revealed in *The Washer of the Ford*! . . . We are moved by the same imaginative vision, the same passionate sympathy with the elementary forces of Nature, and the imperishable primalval human passions.'—**James Ashcroft Noble** (in *The Chronicle* and *The New Age*).

'For sheer originality, other qualities apart, her tales are as remarkable, perhaps, as anything we have had of the kind since Mr. Kipling appeared. . . . Their local colour, their idiom, their whole method combine to produce an effect which may be unaccustomed, but is therefore the more irresistible. They provide as original an entertainment as we are likely to find in this lingering century, and they suggest a new romance among the potential things of the century to come.'—**Ernest Rhys** (in *The Academy*).

